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THE TALISMAN



SIR KENNETH AND THE DWARF

THE TALISMAN

A TALE OF THE CRUSADES

BY

SIR WALTER SCOTT

ADAPTED FOR USE IN SCHOOLS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL HARDY

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PREFACE

In the following pages an attempt, which it is hoped may be found successful, has been made to give one of Sir Walter Scott's tales in a form suitable for school use. "The Talisman" has always been one of the most popular of these tales with young people, and for that reason seems the best calculated for the purpose in view.

The necessary abridgment has been made without any superfluous alteration; and where it has been found necessary to insert an explanatory paragraph, it is carefully distinguished by brackets from the authentic text. The narrative has also been re-arranged in short chapters, suitable in length for reading lessons. With these exceptions no difference will be found between this and the ordinary editions.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

[UNDER the burning sun of Syria, a Crusader was journeying alone through the scorching sands which spread around the Dead Sea. In the distance he espied a group of palm trees, where he might rest, and towards them he guided his faithful horse. Soon, however, he was surprised to see a Saracen cavalier galloping towards him.

The horsemen, representatives as they were of the opposing armies, met in combat; but after a display of valour on both sides, a truce was agreed upon, and they rode side by side to the little cluster of palm trees. In this spot, which was known as "The Diamond of the Desert," they rested, and refreshed themselves with food.

The Crusader, who was named Sir Kenneth, the Knight of the Leopard, was on his way to visit a hermit, Theodorick of Engaddi, to whom he was commissioned by some of the leaders of the Crusade, to communicate certain important matters. The hermit of Engaddi was reputed to be able, by the aid of the stars, to gain some insight into futurity, and was held in great esteem. Saladin himself had issued orders that his dwelling and chapel should be spared and protected.

The Saracen, whose name was Sheerkohf, offered to guide the knight to the hermit's retreat; and on the way thither Sir Kenneth spoke in glowing language of the brave knights and lovely ladies amongst the Crusaders, until he aroused his companion's desire to pay a visit to the camp of the Lion-hearted King Richard of England.

At the caves of Engaddi the two travellers rested, and partook of food supplied by the hermit, who afterwards conducted Sir Kenneth into the chapel. There the knight saw some ladies who were on a pilgrimage. They were all closely veiled, but one of them, in passing Sir Kenneth, dropped rose-buds at his feet, and by signs made him aware that she was the high-born Edith Plantagenet, the lady to whom the knight was devoted, although, on account of her royal descent, he dared not presume to express to her his feelings of admiration.

On the following day Sir Kenneth held certain conferences with the hermit on matters of importance, as he had been instructed to do by the Council of the Crusaders.]

I

KING RICHARD'S CAMP

THE scene must change from the mountain wilderness of Jordan to the camp of King Richard of England, then stationed betwixt Jean d'Acre and Ascalon; and containing that army with which he of the Lion Heart had promised himself a triumphant march to Jerusalem, and in which he would probably have succeeded, if not hindered by the jealousies of the Christian princes engaged in the same enterprise, and the offence taken by them at the uncurbed haughtiness of the English monarch, and Richard's unveiled contempt for his brother sovereigns, who, his equals in rank, were yet far his inferiors in courage, hardihood, and military talents. Such discords, and particularly those betwixt Richard and Philip of France, created disputes and obstacles which impeded

every active measure proposed by the heroic though impetuous Richard.

Saladin, than whom no greater name is recorded in Eastern history, had learnt, to his fatal experience, that his light-armed followers were little able to meet in close encounter with the iron-clad Franks, and had been taught at the same time, to apprehend and dread the adventurous character of his antagonist Richard. But if his armies were more than once routed with great slaughter, his numbers gave the Saracen the advantage in those lighter skirmishes, of which many were inevitable.

There was perpetual warfare of posts and foragers, in which many valuable lives were lost, without any corresponding object being gained; convoys were intercepted, and communications were cut off. The Crusaders had to purchase the means of sustaining life by life itself; and water was only obtained by the expenditure of blood.

These evils were, in a great measure, counterbalanced by the stern resolution and restless activity of King Richard, who, with some of his best knights, was ever on horseback, ready to repair to any point where danger occurred, and often, not only bringing unexpected succour to the Christians, but discomfiting the infidels when they seemed most secure of victory.

But even the iron frame of Cœur de Lion could not support, without injury, the alternations of the unwholesome climate, joined to ceaseless exertions of body and mind. He became afflicted with one of those slow and wasting fevers peculiar to Asia, and, in despite of his great strength, and still greater courage, grew first unfit to mount on horseback, and then unable to attend the councils of war, which were, from time to time, held by the Crusaders.

It was difficult to say whether this state of personal

inactivity was rendered more galling or more endurable to the English monarch, by the resolution of the council to engage in a truce of thirty days with the Sultan Saladin; for, on the one hand, if he was incensed at the delay which this interposed to the progress of the great enterprise, he was, on the other, somewhat consoled by knowing that others were not acquiring laurels, while he remained inactive upon a sick-bed.

That, however, which Cœur de Lion could least excuse was the general inactivity which prevailed in the camp of the Crusaders, so soon as his illness assumed a serious aspect; and the reports which he extracted from his unwilling attendants gave him to understand that the hopes of the host had abated in proportion to his illness.

The English king chafed under these reports, like the imprisoned lion viewing his prey from the iron barriers of his cage. Naturally rash and impetuous, the irritability of his temper preyed on itself. He was dreaded by his attendants, and even the medical assistants feared to assume the necessary authority, which a physician, to do justice to his patient, must needs exercise over him.

One faithful baron, who was devoutly attached to the King's person, dared alone to come between the dragon and his wrath, and quietly, but firmly, maintained a control which no other dared assume over the dangerous invalid, and which Thomas de Multon only exercised, because he esteemed his sovereign's life and honour more than he did the degree of favour which he might lose.

Sir Thomas was the Lord of Gilsland, in Cumberland. He was called by the Normans the Lord de Vaux, and in English, by the Saxons, who clung to their native language, he was termed Thomas, or more familiarly Thom of the Gills, or Narrow Valleys, from which his extensive domains derived their well-known appellation.

II

THE KING ON HIS SICK BED

It was on the decline of a Syrian day that Richard lay on his couch of sickness, loathing it as much in his mind as his illness made it irksome to his body. His manly features showed the progress of wasting illness, and his beard, neglected and untrimmed, had overgrown both lips and chin. Casting himself from side to side, now clutching towards him the coverings, which at the next moment he flung as impatiently from him, his tossed couch and impatient gestures showed at once the energy and the reckless impatience of a disposition, whose natural sphere was that of the most active exertion.

Beside his couch stood Thomas de Vaux, in face, attitude, and manner, the strongest possible contrast to the suffering monarch. His features, though massive like his person, might have been handsome before they were defaced with scars : his frame seemed of that kind which most readily defies both toil and climate, for he was thin flanked, broad chested, long armed, deep breathed, and strong limbed.

This Baron rarely changed his posture, except to administer to Richard the medicine or refreshments, which none of his less favoured attendants could persuade the impatient monarch to take ; and there was something affecting in the kindly, yet awkward manner in which he discharged offices so strangely contrasted with his blunt and soldierly habits and manners.

The pavilion in which these personages were, had, as became the time, as well as the personal character of Richard, more of a warlike than a sumptuous or royal character. Weapons offensive and defensive, several of

them of strange and newly-invented construction, were scattered about the tented apartment. On a small table close by the bed, was placed a shield of wrought steel, of triangular form, bearing the three lions passant, first assumed by the chivalrous monarch, and before it the golden circlet, which formed then the emblem of England's sovereignty. Beside it, as if prompt for defending the regal symbol, lay a mighty curtal axe, which would have wearied the arm of any other than Cœur de Lion.

In an outer partition of the pavilion waited two or three officers of the royal household, depressed, anxious for their master's health, and not less so for their own safety, in case of his decease. Their gloomy apprehensions spread themselves to the warders without, who paced about in downcast and silent contemplation, or, resting on their halberds, stood motionless on their post, rather like armed trophies than living warriors.

"So thou hast no better news to bring me from without, Sir Thomas?" said the King, after a long and perturbed silence, spent in the feverish agitation which we have endeavoured to describe. "All our knights turned women and our ladies become devotees, and neither a spark of valour nor of gallantry to enlighten a camp which contains the choicest of Europe's chivalry—Ha!"

"The truce, my lord," said De Vaux, with the same patience with which he had twenty times repeated the explanation—"the truce prevents us bearing ourselves as men of action; and, for the ladies, thus far I know, that our choicest beauties are waiting upon the Queen's Majesty and the Princess, to a pilgrimage to the convent of Engaddi, to accomplish their vows for your Highness's deliverance from this trouble."

"And is it thus," said Richard, with the impatience of indisposition, "that royal matrons and maidens should risk themselves, where the dogs who defile the land have

as little truth to man, as they have faith towards God ? "

" Nay, my lord," said De Vaux, " they have Saladin's word for their safety."

" True, true ! " replied Richard, " and I did the heathen Soldan injustice—I owe him reparation for it. Would God I were but fit to offer it him upon my body between the two hosts—Christendom and Heathenesse both looking on ! "

As Richard spoke, he thrust his right arm out of bed, naked to the shoulder, and, painfully raising himself in his couch, shook his clenched hand, as if it grasped sword or battle-axe, and was then brandished over the jewelled turban of the Soldan. It was not without a gentle degree of violence, which the King would scarce have endured from another, that De Vaux, in his character of sick-nurse, compelled his royal master to replace himself in the couch, and covered his sinewy arm, neck and shoulders, with the care which a mother bestows upon an impatient child.

" Thou art a rough nurse, though a willing one, De Vaux," said the King, laughing with a bitter expression, while he submitted to the strength which he was unable to resist.

" What is a fever-fit," said De Vaux, " that we should not endure it patiently, in order to get rid of it easily ? "

" Fever-fit ! " exclaimed Richard, impetuously ; " thou mayest think, and justly, that it is a fever-fit with me ; but what is it with all the other Christian princes—with Philip of France—with that dull Austrian—with him of Montserrat—with the Hospitallers—with the Templars—what is it with all them ?—I will tell thee—it is a cold palsy—a dead lethargy—a disease that deprives them of speech and action—that has made them false to the noblest vow ever knights were sworn to—has made them indifferent to their fame, and forgetful of their God ! "

"For the love of Heaven, my liege," said De Vaux, "take it less violently—you will be heard without doors, where such speeches are but too current already among the common soldiery, and engender discord and contention in the Christian host. Bethink you that your illness mars the mainspring of their enterprise."

Richard reclined his head on the pillow, with a more deliberate attempt to repose than he had yet exhibited. But Thomas de Vaux was no courtier. He was silent, therefore, until, relapsing into his moody contemplations, the King demanded of him sharply—

"Does a league of monarchs, an assemblage of nobles, a convocation of all the chivalry of Europe, droop with the sickness of one man, though he chances to be King of England? Why should Richard's illness, or Richard's death, check the march of thirty thousand men, as brave as himself? When the master stag is struck down, the herd do not disperse upon his fall. Why do not the powers assemble and choose some one, to whom they may intrust the guidance of the host?"

"Forsooth, and if it please your Majesty," said De Vaux, "I hear consultations have been held among the royal leaders for some such purpose."

"Ha!" exclaimed Richard, his jealously awakened giving his mental irritation another direction—"Am I forgot by my allies ere I have taken the last sacrament?—do they hold me dead already? But no, no—they are right. And whom do they select as leader of the Christian host?"

"Rank and dignity," said De Vaux, "point to the King of France."

"Oh, ay," answered the English monarch, "Philip of France and Navarre, his Most Christian Majesty! mouth-filling words these! There is but one risk—that he might lead us back to Paris, instead of marching to Jerusalem.

His politic head has learned by this time, that there is more to be gotten by oppressing his feudatories, and pillaging his allies, than fighting with the Turks for the Holy Sepulchre."

"They might choose the Archduke of Austria," said De Vaux.

"What! because he is big and burly like thyself, Thomas—nearly as thick-headed, but without thy indifference to danger, and carelessness of offence? I tell thee that Austria has in all that mass of flesh no bolder animation than is afforded by the peevishness of a wasp, and the courage of a wren. Out upon him!—*he* a leader of chivalry to deeds of glory!"

"There is the Grand Master of the Templars," continued the baron, not sorry to keep his master's attention engaged on other topics than his own illness, though at the expense of the characters of prince and potentate—"There is the Grand Master of the Templars," he continued, "undaunted, skilful, brave in battle, and sage in council, having no separate kingdoms of his own to divert his exertions from the recovery of the Holy Land—what thinks your Majesty of the Master as a general leader of the Christian host?"

"Ha!" answered the King. "Oh, no exception can be taken to Brother Giles Amaury—he understands the ordering of a battle, and the fighting in front when it begins. But, Sir Thomas, were it fair to take the Holy Land from the heathen Saladin, so full of all the virtues which may distinguish unchristened man, and give it to Giles Amaury, a worse Pagan than himself?"

"Well, then, I will venture but another guess," said the Baron de Vaux. "What say you to the gallant Marquis of Montserrat, so wise, so elegant, such a good man-at-arms?"

"Wise? cunning, you would say," replied Richard.

Oh ay, Conrade of Montserrat,—who knows not the popinjay ? A man-at-arms ? ay, a fine figure on horse-back, and can bear him well in the tilt-yard, and at the barriers, when swords are blunted at point and edge, and spears are tipped with trenchers of wood, instead of steel pikes. Wert thou not with me, when I said to that same gay Marquis, ' Here we be, three good Christians, and on yonder plain there pricks a band of some threescore Saracens, what say you to charge them briskly ? There are but twenty unbelieving miscreants to each true knight.' "

" I recollect the Marquis replied," said De Vaux, " that his limbs were of flesh, not of iron, and that he would rather bear the heart of a man than of a beast, though that beast were the lion. But I see how it is—we shall end where we began, without hope of praying at the Sepulchre, until Heaven shall restore King Richard to health."

At this grave remark, Richard burst out into a hearty fit of laughter, the first which he had for some time indulged in. " Why, what a thing is conscience," he said. " that through its means even such a thick-witted northern lord as thou, canst bring thy sovereign to confess his folly ! It is true, that, did they not propose themselves as fit to hold my leading-staff, little should I care for plucking the silken trappings off the puppets thou hast shown me in succession—What concerns it me what fine tinsel robes they swagger in, unless when they are named as rivals in the glorious enterprise to which I have vowed myself ? Yes, De Vaux, I confess my weakness, and the wilfulness of my ambition. The Christian camp contains, doubtless, many a better knight than Richard of England, and it would be wise and worthy to assign to the best of them the leading of the host—but," continued the warlike monarch, raising himself in his bed, and shaking the cover from his head, while his eyes sparkled as they were

wont to do on the eve of battle, "were such a knight to plant the banner of the Cross on the Temple of Jerusalem, while I was unable to bear my share in the noble task, he should, so soon as I was fit to lay lance in rest, undergo my challenge to mortal combat, for having diminished my fame, and pressed in before to the object of my enterprise.—But hark, what trumpets are those at a distance?"

"Those of King Philip, as I guess, my liege," said the stout Englishman.

"Thou art dull of ear, Thomas," said the King, endeavouring to start up—"hearest thou not that clash and clang? By Heaven, the Turks are in the camp—I hear their lelies."[1]

He again endeavoured to get out of bed, and De Vaux was obliged to exercise his own great strength, and also to summon the assistance of the chamberlains from the inner tent, to restrain him.

"Thou art a false traitor, De Vaux," said the incensed monarch, when, breathless and exhausted with struggling, he was compelled to submit to superior strength, and to repose in quiet on his couch. "I would I were—I would I were but strong enough to dash thy brains out with my battle-axe."

"I would you had the strength, my liege," said De Vaux, "and would even take the risk of its being so employed. The odds would be great in favour of Christendom, were Thomas Multon dead, and Cœur de Lion himself again."

"Mine honest faithful servant," said Richard, extending his hand, which the baron reverentially saluted, "forgive thy master's impatience of mood. It is this burning fever which chides thee, and not thy kind master, Richard of England. But go, I prithee, and bring me

[1] Lelies = war cries.

word what strangers are in the camp, for these sounds are not of Christendom."

De Vaux left the pavilion on the errand assigned, and, in his absence, which he had resolved should be brief, he charged the chamberlains, pages, and attendants to redouble their attention on their sovereign, with threats of holding them to responsibility, which rather added to than diminished their timid anxiety in the discharge of their duty; for next perhaps to the ire of the monarch himself, they dreaded that of the stern and inexorable Lord of Gilsland.

III

THE RETURN OF SIR KENNETH

Thomas De Vaux had not made many steps beyond the entrance of the royal pavilion, when he was aware of what the far more acute ear of the English monarch had instantly discovered, that the musical strains, namely, which had reached their ears, were produced by the pipes, shalms, and kettle-drums of the Saracens; and, at the bottom of an avenue of tents, which formed a broad access to the pavilion of Richard, he could see a crowd of idle soldiers assembled round the spot from which the music was heard, almost in the centre of the camp; and he saw, with great surprise, mingled amid the helmets of various forms worn by the Crusaders of different nations, white turbans and long pikes, announcing the presence of armed Saracens, and the huge deformed heads of several camels or dromedaries, overlooking the multitude by aid of their long disproportioned necks.

Wondering and displeased at a sight so unexpected and singular, the baron looked eagerly round for some one

of whom he might inquire the cause of this alarming novelty.

The first person whom he met advancing to him, he set down at once, by his grave and haughty step, as a Spaniard or a Scot; and presently after muttered to himself—"And a Scot it is—he of the Leopard.—I have seen him fight indifferently well, for one of his country."

Loath to ask even a passing question, he was about to pass Sir Kenneth, with that sullen and lowering port which seems to say, "I know thee, but I will hold no communication with thee"; but his purpose was defeated by the Northern Knight, who moved forward directly to him, and accosting him with formal courtesy, said, "My Lord de Vaux of Gilsland, I have in charge to speak with you."

"Ha!" returned the English baron, "with me? But, say your pleasure, so it be shortly spoken—I am on the King's errand."

"Mine touches King Richard yet more nearly," answered Sir Kenneth; "I bring him, I trust, health."

The Lord of Gilsland measured the Scot with incredulous eyes, and replied, "Thou art no leech, I think Sir Scot—I had as soon thought of your bringing the King of England wealth."

Sir Kenneth, though displeased with the manner of the baron's reply, answered calmly: "Health to Richard is glory and wealth to Christendom. But my time presses; I pray you may I see the King?"

"Surely not, fair sir," said the baron, "until your errand be told more distinctly. The sick chambers of princes open not to all who inquire."

"My Lord," said Kenneth, "the cross which I wear in common with yourself, and the importance of what I have to tell, must, for the present, cause me to pass over a

bearing, which else I were unapt to endure. In plain language, then, I bring with me a Moorish physician, who undertakes to work a cure on King Richard."

"A Moorish physician!" said De Vaux; "and who will warrant that he brings not poisons instead of remedies?"

"His own life, my lord—his head, which he offers as guarantee."

"I have known many a resolute ruffian," said De Vaux, "who valued his own life as little as it deserved, and would troop to the gallows as merrily as if the hangman were his partner in a dance."

"But thus it is, my Lord," replied the Scot; "Saladin, to whom none will deny the credit of a generous and valiant enemy, hath sent this leech hither with an honourable retinue and guard, befitting the high estimation in which El Hakim[1] is held by the Soldan, and with fruits and refreshments for the Kings' private chamber, and such message as may pass betwixt honourable enemies. Will it please you who are of the King's secret council, to cause these camels to be discharged of their burdens, and some order taken as to the reception of the learned physician?"

"Wonderful!" said De Vaux, as speaking to himself. "May I crave of you, Sir Knight, how you became concerned in this affair?"

"I have been absent on a pilgrimage, in the course of which," replied Sir Kenneth, "I had a message to discharge towards the holy hermit of Engaddi."

"May I not be intrusted with it, Sir Kenneth, and with the answer of the holy man?"

"It may not be, my lord," answered the Scot.

"I am of the secret council of England," said the Englishman, haughtily.

[1] El Hakim = the physician.

"To which land I know no allegiance," said Kenneth. "Though I have voluntarily followed in this war the personal fortunes of England's sovereign, I was despatched by the General Council of the kings, princes, and supreme leaders of the army of the Blessed Cross, and to them only I render my errand."

"Ha! say'st thou!" said the proud Baron de Vaux, "But know, messenger of the kings and princes as thou may'st be, no leech shall approach the sick-bed of Richard of England, without the consent of him of Gilsland; and they will come on evil errand who dare to intrude themselves against it."

"I protest unto you," said the Scottish knight, "that I desire but the safety of Richard Cœur de Lion, in recommending the ministry of this Moslem physician."

The Englishman answered with more cordiality than he had yet exhibited, "Tell me, Sir Knight of the Leopard, granting (which I do not doubt) that thou art thyself satisfied in this matter, shall I do well, in a land where the art of poisoning is as general as that of cooking, to bring this unknown physician to practise with his drugs on a health so valuable to Christendom?"

"My lord," replied the Scot, "thus only can I reply; that my squire, the only one of my retinue whom war and disease had left in attendance on me, has been of late suffering dangerously under this same fever, which, in valiant King Richard, has disabled the principal limb of our holy enterprise. This leech, this El Hakim, hath ministered remedies to him not two hours since, and already he hath fallen into a refreshing sleep. That he *can* cure the disorder, which has proved so fatal, I nothing doubt."

[De Vaux visited the tent of Sir Kenneth and saw the physician who was attending his squire. He was favourably impressed.]

The two warriors parted much better friends than they had met; but ere they separated, Thomas de Vaux informed himself at more length of the circumstances attending the mission of the Eastern physician, and received from the Scottish knight the credentials which he had brought to King Richard on the part of Saladin.

IV

SALADIN'S OFFER TO KING RICHARD

"This is a strange tale, Sir Thomas," said the sick monarch, when he had heard the report of the trusty Baron of Gilsland; "art thou sure this Scottish man is a tall man and true?"

"I cannot say, my lord," replied the jealous Borderer "I live a little too near the Scots to gather much truth among them, having found them ever fair and false. But this man's bearing is that of a true man—that I must needs say for him in conscience."

"And for his carriage as a knight, how say'st thou, De Vaux?" demanded the King.

"It is your Majesty's business more than mine to note men's bearings; and I warrant you have noted the manner in which this man of the Leopard hath borne himself. He hath been well spoken of."

"And justly, Thomas," said the King. "We have ourselves witnessed him—and he had ere now tasted of our bounty, but that I have also marked his overweening and audacious presumption. But to this piece of learned heathenesse—say'st thou the Scot met him in the desert?"

"No, my liege, the Scot's tale runs thus:—He was despatched to the old hermit of the Engaddi, of whom men talk so much——"

"By whom despatched, and for what?" said Richard, starting up. "Who dared send any one thither, when our Queen was in the Convent of Engaddi, upon her pilgrimage for our recovery?"

"The Council of the Crusade sent him, my lord," answered the Baron de Vaux; "for what purpose, he declined to account to me."

"Well, it shall be looked into," said Richard. "So this Scottish man, this envoy, met with a wandering physician at the grotto of Engaddi—ha?"

"Not so, my liege," replied De Vaux; "but he met, I think, near that place, with a Saracen Emir, with whom he had some *mêlée* in the way of proof of valour, and finding him worthy to bear brave men company, they went together, as errant knights are wont, to the grotto of Engaddi."

Here De Vaux stopped, for he was not one of those who can tell a long story in a sentence.

"And did they there meet the physician?" demanded the King impatiently.

"No, my liege," replied De Vaux; "but the Saracen learning your Majesty's grievous illness, undertook that Saladin should send his own physician to you, and with many assurances of his eminent skill; and he came to the grotto accordingly, after the Scottish Knight had tarried a day for him and more. He is attended as if he were a prince, with servants on horse and foot, and brings with him letters of credence from Saladin."

"Have they been examined?"

"I showed them to the interpreter ere bringing them hither, and behold their contents in English."

Richard took a scroll in which were inscribed these words:—"*The blessing of Allah aud his Prophet Mahommed* ('Out upon the hound!' said Richard, spitting in contempt, by way of interjection;) *Saladin,*

king of kings, Soldan of Egypt and of Syria, the light and refuge of the earth, to the great Melech Ric, Richard of England, greeting. Whereas, we have been informed that the hand of sickness hath been heavy upon thee, our royal brother, and that thou hast with thee only such Nazarene and Jewish mediciners, as work without the blessing of Allah and our holy Prophet ('Confusion on his head!' again muttered the English monarch), *we have therefore sent to tend and wait upon thee at this time, the physician to our own person, Adonbec el Hakim. And this we do, praying you heartily to honour and make use of his skill; not only that we may do service to thy worth and valour, but that we may bring the controversy which is at present between us at an end, either by honourable agreement, or by open trial with our weapons, in a fair field; seeing that it neither becomes thy place and courage, to die the death of a slave who hath been overwrought by his taskmaster, nor befits it our fame that a brave adversary be snatched from our weapon by such a disease. And, therefore, may the holy——*"

"Hold, hold," said Richard, "I will have no more of his dog of a Prophet! It makes me sick to think the valiant and worthy Soldan should believe in a dead dog.—Yes, I will see his physician. I will put myself into the charge of this Hakim—I will repay the noble Soldan his generosity—I will meet Saladin in the field, as he so worthily proposes, and he shall have no cause to term Richard of England ungrateful. I will strike him to the earth with my battle-axe—I will convert him to Holy Church with such blows as he has rarely endured. Haste, De Vaux, why dost thou delay a conclusion so pleasing? Fetch the Hakim hither."

"My lord," said the baron, who perhaps saw some accession of fever in this overflow of confidence,—"bethink you, the Soldan is a pagan, and that you are his most formidable enemy——"

"For which reason he is the more bound to do me service in this matter, lest a paltry fever end the quarrel betwixt two such kings. I tell thee, he loves me as I love him—as noble adversaries ever love each other—by my honour, it were sin to doubt his good faith!"

"Nevertheless, my lord, it were well to wait the issue of those medicines upon the Scottish squire," said the Lord of Gilsland; "my own life depends upon it, for worthy were I to die like a dog, did I proceed rashly in this matter, and make shipwreck of the weal of Christendom."

"I never knew thee before hesitate for fear of life," said Richard, upbraidingly.

"Nor would I now, my liege," replied the stout-hearted baron, "save that yours lies at pledge as well as my own."

"Well, thou suspicious mortal," answered Richard, "begone then, and watch the progress of this remedy. I could almost wish it might either cure or kill me, for I am weary of lying here like an ox dying of the murrain, when tambours are beating, horses stamping, and trumpets sounding without."

The baron hastily departed, resolved, however, to communicate his errand to some churchman, as he felt something burdened in conscience at the idea of his master being attended by an unbeliever.

V

THE PHYSICIAN PROVES HIS SKILL

THE Archbishop of Tyre was the first to whom De Vaux confided his doubts, knowing his interest with his master, Richard, who both loved and honoured that sagacious prelate.

The baron showed him the letters of credence. He read and re-read them, and compared the original with the translation.

" It is a dish choicely cooked," he said, " to the palate of King Richard, and I cannot but have my suspicions of the wily Saracen. They are curious in the art of poisons, and can so temper them that they shall be weeks in acting upon the party, during which time the perpetrator has leisure to escape. But come, my Lord De Vaux," he continued, " wend we to the tent of this sick squire, where we shall learn whether this Hakim hath really the art of curing which he professeth, ere we consider whether there be safety in permitting him to exercise his art upon King Richard."

As they paused before the wretched hut in which Kenneth of the Leopard and his follower abode, the bishop said to De Vaux, " Now, of a surety, my lord, these Scottish knights have worse care of their followers than we of our dogs. Here is a knight, valiant they say in battle, and thought fitting to be graced with charges of weight in time of truce, whose esquire of the body is lodged worse than in the worst dog-kennel in England. What say you of your neighbours ? "

" That a master doth well enough for his servant, when he lodgeth him in no worse dwelling than his own," said De Vaux, and entered the hut.

The bishop followed, with a stateliness of manner, calculated, as he thought, to impose respect on the stranger.

The Moorish physician, whom he had come to see, sat cross-legged upon a mat made of twisted leaves, by the side of the patient, who appeared in deep slumber, and whose pulse he felt from time to time.

The Baron of Gilsland authoritatively demanded what evidence Adonbec could produce of his medical proficiency.

"Ye have the word of the mighty Saladin," said the sage, touching his cap in sign of reverence; "a word which was never broken towards friend or foe—what, Nazarene, would'st thou demand more?"

"I would have ocular proof of thy skill," said the baron, "and without it thou approachest not to the couch of King Richard."

"The praise of the physician," said the Arabian, "is in the recovery of his patient. Behold this sergeant, whose blood has been dried up by the fever which has whitened your camp with skeletons, and against which the art of your Nazarene leeches hath been like a silken doublet against a lance of steel. Look at his fingers and arms, wasted like the claws and shanks of the crane. Death had this morning his clutch on him. Disturb me not with further questions, but await the critical minute, and behold in silent wonder the marvellous event."

The Arab drew a sponge from a small silver box, dipped perhaps in some aromatic distillation; for when he put it to the sleeper's nose, he sneezed, awoke, and looked wildly around. He was a ghastly spectacle, as he sat up almost naked on his couch, the bones and cartilages as visible through the surface of his skin, as if they had never been clothed with flesh. He seemed to be aware of the presence of his dignified visitors, for he attempted feebly to pull the covering from his head, in token of reverence, as he inquired, in a subdued and submissive voice, for his master.

"Do you know us, vassal?" said the Lord of Gilsland.

"Not perfectly, my lord," replied the squire, faintly. "My sleep has been long and full of dreams. Yet I know that you are a great English lord, as seemeth by the red cross, and this a holy prelate, whose blessing I crave on me a poor sinner."

"Your eyes witness," said the Arabian, "the fever hath been subdued—he speaks with calmness and recollection—his pulse beats composedly as yours—try its pulsations yourself."

Thomas of Gilsland did so, and satisfied himself that the fever was indeed gone.

"This is most wonderful," said the knight, looking to the bishop; "the man is assuredly cured. I must conduct this mediciner presently to King Richard's tent—What thinks your reverence?"

"Stay, let me finish one cure ere I commence another," said the Arab; "I will pass with you when I have given my patient the second cup of this most holy elixir."

So saying he pulled out a silver cup, and filling it with water from a gourd which stood by the bedside, he next drew forth a small silken bag made of network, twisted with silver, the contents of which the bystanders could not discover, and immersing it in the cup, continued to watch it in silence during the space of five minutes. It seemed to the spectators as if some effervescence took place during the operation, but if so, it instantly subsided.

"Drink," said the physician to the sick man—"sleep and awaken free from malady."

"And with this simple-seeming draught, thou wilt undertake to cure a monarch?" said the Bishop of Tyre.

"I have cured a beggar, as you may behold," replied the sage. "Are kings made of other clay than the meanest of their subjects?"

"Let us have him presently to the King," said the Baron of Gilsland. "He hath shown that he possesses the secret which may restore his health. If he fails to exercise it, I will put himself past the power of medicine."

VI

SIR KENNETH'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING

THE Baron of Gilsland walked with slow step and an anxious countenance towards the royal pavilion. He knew that, however unworthily, it had been always his master's fate to draw as much reproach and dislike, as honour and attachment, from the display of his great qualities; and that in the very camp, and amongst those princes bound by oath to the Crusade, were many who would have sacrificed all hope of victory over the Saracens, to the pleasure of ruining, or at least of humbling, Richard of England.

"Wherefore," said the baron to himself, "it is in no sense impossible that this El Hakim, with this his cure, or seeming cure, wrought on the body of the Scottish squire, may mean nothing but a trick, to which he of the Leopard may be accessory."

He resolved to lay his scruples bluntly before the King, of whose judgment he had nearly as high an opinion as of his valour.

Meantime, events had taken place very contrary to the suppositions which Thomas De Vaux had entertained. Scarce had he left the royal pavilion, when, betwixt the impatience of the fever, and that which was natural to his disposition, Richard began to murmur at his delay, and express an earnest desire for his return. At length, some two hours before sundown, and long, therefore, ere he could expect a satisfactory account of the process of the cure which the Moor or Arabian had undertaken, he sent a messenger commanding the attendance of the Knight of the Leopard, determined to soothe his impatience by obtaining from Sir Kenneth a more particular account of

the cause of his absence from the camp, and the circumstances of his meeting with this celebrated physician.

The Scottish knight, thus summoned, entered the royal presence, as one who was no stranger to such scenes.

The King gazed fixedly on Sir Kenneth approaching his bedside, while the knight bent his knee for a moment, then arose, and stood before him in a posture of deference, but not of subservience or humility, as became an officer in the presence of his sovereign.

"Thy name," said the King, "is Kenneth of the Leopard —From whom had'st thou degree of knighthood?"

"I took it from the sword of William the Lion, King of Scotland," replied the Scot.

"A weapon," said the King, "well worthy to confer honour, nor has it been laid on an undeserving shoulder. We have seen thee bear thyself knightly and valiantly in press of battle, when most need there was; and thou had'st not been yet to learn that thy deserts were known to us, but that thy presumption in other points has been such, that thy services can challenge no better reward than that of pardon for thy transgression. What sayest thou—ha?"

Kenneth attempted to speak, but was unable to express himself distinctly; the consciousness of his too ambitious love, and the keen falcon glance with which Cœur de Lion seemed to penetrate his inmost soul, combining to disconcert him.

"I desire to know of you, Sir Knight, wherefore, and by whose authority, you took this recent journey to the wilderness of the Dead Sea and Engaddi?"

"By order," replied the knight, "of the Council of Princes of the Holy Crusade."

"And how dared any one to give such an order, when I —not the least, surely, in the league—was unacquainted with it?"



"THE SCOTTISH KNIGHT . . . ENTERED THE ROYAL PRESENCE."

"It was not my part, please your highness," said the Scot, "to inquire into such particulars. I am a soldier of the Cross—serving, doubtless, for the present, under your highness's banner, and proud of the permission to do so. That indisposition should seclude, I trust for but a short time, your highness from their councils, in which you hold so potential a voice, I must lament with all Christendom; but, as a soldier, I must obey those on whom the lawful right of command devolves, or set but an evil example in the Christian camp."

"Thou say'st well," said King Richard; "and the blame rests not with thee, but with those with whom, when it shall please heaven to raise me from this accursed bed of pain and inactivity, I hope to reckon roundly. What was the purport of thy message?"

"Methinks, and please your highness," replied Sir Kenneth, "that were best asked of those who sent me, and who can render the reasons of mine errand; whereas I can only tell its outward form and purport."

"Palter not with me, Sir Scot—it were ill for thy safety," said the irritable monarch.

"My safety, my lord," replied the knight firmly, "I cast behind me as a regardless thing when I vowed myself to this enterprise, looking rather to my immortal welfare, than to that which concerns my earthly body."

"By the mass," said King Richard, "thou art a brave fellow! Hark thee, Sir Knight, I love the Scottish people: they are hardy, though dogged and stubborn, and, I think, true men in the main, though the necessity of state has sometimes constrained them to be dissemblers. I deserve some love at their hand, for I have voluntarily done what they could not by arms have extorted from me, any more than from my predecessors—I have re-established the fortresses of Roxburgh and Berwick, which lay in pledge to England—I have restored your ancient boundaries—

and, finally, I have renounced a claim to homage upon the crown of England, which I thought unjustly forced on you. I have endeavoured to make honourable and independent friends, where former kings of England attempted only to compel unwilling and rebellious vassals."

"All this you have done, my Lord King," said Sir Kenneth, bowing—"All this you have done, by your royal treaty with our sovereign at Canterbury. Therefore have you me, and many better Scottish men, making war against the infidels, under your banners, who would else have been ravaging your frontiers in England. If their numbers are now few, it is because their lives have been freely waged and wasted."

"I grant it true," said the King; "and for the good offices I have done your land, I require you to remember, that, as a principal member of the Christian league, I have a right to know the negotiations of my confederates. Do me, therefore, the justice to tell me what I have a title to be acquainted with, and which I am certain to know more truly from you than from others."

"My lord," said the Scot, "thus conjured, I will speak the truth; for I well believe that your purposes towards the principal object of our expedition are single-hearted and honest; and it is more than I dare warrant for others of the Holy League. Be pleased, therefore, to know, my charge was to propose, through the medium of the hermit of Engaddi—a holy man, respected and protected by Saladin himself——"

"A continuation of the truce, I doubt not," said Richard, hastily interrupting him.

"No, by Saint Andrew, my liege," said the Scottish knight, "but the establishment of a lasting peace, and the withdrawing our armies from Palestine."

"Saint George!" said Richard, in astonishment. "Ill as I have justly thought of them, I could not have

dreamed they would have humbled themselves to such dishonour. Speak, Sir Kenneth, with what will did you carry such a message ? "

"With right good will, my lord," said Kenneth; "because, when we had lost our noble leader, under whose guidance alone I hoped for victory, I saw none who could succeed him likely to lead us to conquest, and I accounted it well in such circumstances to avoid defeat."

"And on what conditions was this hopeful peace to be contracted ? " said King Richard, painfully suppressing the passion with which his heart was almost bursting.

"These were not intrusted to me, my lord," answered the Knight of the Couchant Leopard, "I delivered them sealed to the hermit. Might I so far presume, my Lord King, this discourse but heats your disease, the enemy from which Christendom dreads more evil, than from armed hosts of infidels."

At this moment some bustling was heard in the outer apartment, and the King, hastily changing to his more natural manner, said, "Enough—begone—speed to De Vaux, and send him thither with the Arabian physician. My life for the faith of the Soldan ! Would he but abjure his false law, I would aid him with my sword to drive this scum of French and Austrians from his dominions, and think Palestine as well ruled by him as when her kings were anointed by the decree of heaven itself."

VII

THE PHYSICIAN AT THE KING'S BEDSIDE

The Knight of the Leopard retired, and presently afterwards the chamberlain announced a deputation from the Council, who had come to wait on the Majesty of England.

"It is well they allow that I am living yet," was his reply. "Who are the reverend ambassadors?"

"The Grand Master of the Templars, and the Marquis of Montserrat."

"Our brother of France loves not sick-beds," said Richard; "yet, had Philip been ill, I had stood by his couch long since. Jocelyn, lay me the couch more fairly, it is tumbled like a stormy sea—reach me yonder steel mirror—pass a comb through my hair and beard. They look, indeed, more like a lion's mane than a Christian man's locks—bring water. There, then"—he said, after having made his ablutions "admit the worshipful envoys; they will now, I think, scarcely see that disease has made Richard negligent of his person."

The celebrated Master of the Templars was a tall, thin, war-worn man, with a slow yet penetrating eye, and a brow on which a thousand dark intrigues had stamped a portion of their obscurity.

Conrade of Montserrat had a much more pleasing exterior than the dark and mysterious priest-soldier by whom he was accompanied. He was a handsome man, of middle age, or something past that term, bold in the field, sagacious in council, gay and gallant in times of festivity; but, on the other hand, he was of a narrow and selfish ambition.

When the usual salutations had been made by these dignitaries, and courteously returned by King Richard, the Marquis of Montserrat commenced an explanation of the motives of their visit, sent, as he said they were, by the anxious kings and princes who composed the Council of the Crusaders, to "inquire into the health of their magnanimous ally, the valiant King of England."

"We know the importance in which the Princes of the Council hold our health," replied the English King; "and are well aware how much they must have suffered by

suppressing all curiosity concerning it for fourteen days."

The flow of the Marquis's eloquence being checked, and he himself thrown into some confusion by this reply, his more austere companion took up the thread of the conversation, and informed the King that they came from the Council to pray, in the name of Christendom, "that he would not suffer his health to be tampered with by an infidel physician, said to be despatched by Saladin."

"Grand Master of the Holy and Valiant Order of Knights Templars, and you, Most Noble Marquis of Montserrat," replied Richard, "if it please you to retire into the adjoining pavilion, you shall presently see what account we make of the tender remonstrances of our royal and princely colleagues in this most religious warfare."

The Marquis and Grand Master retired accordingly; nor had they been many minutes in the outward pavilion when the Eastern physician arrived, accompanied by the Baron of Gilsland, and Kenneth of Scotland. The baron, however, was a little later of entering the tent than the other two, stopping, perchance, to issue some orders to the warders without.

As the Arabian physician entered, he made his obeisance, after the Oriental fashion, to the Marquis and Grand Master, whose dignity was apparent, both from their appearance and their bearing. There was a pause; for the Scottish knight, waiting for the arrival of De Vaux, presumed not, of his own authority, to enter the tent of the King of England, and, during this interval, the Grand Master sternly demanded of the Moslem,—"Infidel, hast thou the courage to practise thine art upon the person of an anointed sovereign of the Christian host?"

"The sun of Allah," answered the sage, "shines on the Nazarene as well as on the true believer, and his servant

dare make no distinction betwixt them, when called on to exercise his art of healing."

"Misbelieving Hakim," said the Grand Master, "or whatsoever they call thee for an unbaptized slave of darkness, dost thou well know, that thou shalt be torn asunder by wild horses should King Richard die under thy charge?"

"That were hard justice," answered the physician: "seeing that I can but use human means, I have the command of my sovereign, the Soldan Saladin, to heal this Nazarene King, and, with the blessing of the Prophet, I will obey his commands. If I fail, ye wear swords thirsting for the blood of the faithful, and I proffer my body to your weapons. I pray you interpose no delay between me and my office."

"Who talks of delay?" said the Baron de Vaux, hastily entering the tent; "we have had but too much already.—I salute you, my Lord of Montserrat, and you, valiant Grand Master. But I must presently pass with this learned physician to the bedside of my master."

"My lord," said the Marquis, "are you well advised that we came to expostulate on the part of the Council of the Monarchs and Princes of the Crusade, against the risk of permitting an infidel and Eastern physician to tamper with a health so valuable as that of your master, King Richard."

"Noble Lord Marquis," replied the Englishman, bluntly "I can neither use many words, nor do I delight in listening to them—moreover, I am much more ready to believe what my eyes have seen, than what my ears have heard. I am satisfied that this heathen can cure the sickness of King Richard, and I believe and trust he will labour to do so. Time is precious. Move onward, El Hakim."

The Grand Master looked grimly on the unceremonious

old soldier, but, on exchanging a glance with the Marquis, smoothed his frowning brow as well as he could, and both followed De Vaux and the Arabian into the inner tent, where Richard lay expecting them, with that impatience with which the sick patient watches the step of his physician. Sir Kenneth, whose attendance seemed neither asked nor prohibited, felt himself, by the circumstances in which he stood, entitled to follow these high dignitaries, but, conscious of his inferior power and rank, remained aloof during the scene which took place.

Richard, when they entered his apartment, immediately exclaimed, "So ho! a goodly fellowship come to see Richard take his leap in the dark.—My noble allies, I greet you as the representatives of our assembled league; Richard will again be amongst you in his former fashion, or ye shall bear to the grave what is left of him.—De Vaux, lives he or dies he, thou hast the thanks of thy prince.—There is yet another—but this fever hath wasted my eyesight—what, the bold Scot!—he is welcome too, —Come, Sir Hakim, to the work, to the work."

The physician, who had already informed himself of the various symptoms of the King's illness, now felt his pulse for a long time, and with deep attention, while all around stood silent, and in breathless expectation. The sage next filled a cup with spring water, and dipped into it the small red purse, which, as formerly, he took from his bosom. When he seemed to think it sufficiently medicated, he was about to offer it to the sovereign, who prevented him, by saying, "Hold an instant.—Thou hast felt my pulse—let me lay my finger on thine.—I too, as becomes a good knight, know something of thine art."

The Arabian yielded his hand without hesitation, and his long slender dark fingers were, for an instant, enclosed, and almost buried, in the large enfoldment of King Richard's hand.

"His blood beats calm as an infant's," said the King; "so throb not theirs who poison princes. De Vaux, whether we live or die, dismiss this Hakim with honour and safety.—Commend us, friend, to the noble Saladin. Should I die, it is without doubt of his faith—should I live, it will be to thank him as a warrior would desire to be thanked."

He then raised himself in bed, took the cup in his hand, and, turning to the Marquis and the Grand Master,—"Mark what I say, and let my royal brethren pledge me in Cyprus wine—'To the immortal honour of the first Crusader who shall strike lance or sword on the gate of Jerusalem; and to the shame and eternal infamy of whomsoever shall turn back from the plough on which he hath laid his hand!'"

He drained the cup to the bottom, resigned it to the Arabian, and sunk back, as if exhausted, upon the cushions which were arranged to receive him. The physician, then, with silent but expressive signs, directed that all should leave the tent excepting himself and De Vaux, whom no remonstrance could induce to withdraw. The apartment was cleared accordingly.

VIII

TRAITORS IN THE CAMP

THE Marquis of Montserrat, and the Grand Master of the Knights Templars, stood together in the front of the royal pavilion, within which this singular scene had passed, and beheld a strong guard of bills and bows drawn out to form a circle around it and keep at distance all which might disturb the sleeping monarch. The soldiers wore the downcast, silent, and sullen looks, with which they

trail their arms at a funeral, and stepped with such caution that you could not hear a buckler ring, or a sword clatter, though so many men in armour were moving around the tent.

"There is a change of cheer among these island dogs," said the Grand Master to Conrade, when they had passed Richard's guards. "What hoarse tumult and revel used to be before this pavilion! nought but pitching the bar, hurling the ball, wrestling, and roaring of songs, among these burly yeomen, as if they were holding some country wake, with a Maypole in the midst of them, instead of a royal standard."

"Mastiffs are a faithful race," said Conrade; "and the King their master has won their love by being ready to wrestle, brawl, or revel amongst the foremost of them, whenever the humour seized him."

"He is totally compounded of humours," said the Grand Master. "Marked you the pledge he gave us, instead of a prayer, over his grace-cup yonder?"

"He would have felt it a grace-cup, and a well spiced one too," said the Marquis, "were Saladin like any other Turk that ever wore turban."

They were now near their horses, which stood at some distance from the royal tent, prancing among the gallant train of esquires and pages by whom they were attended, when Conrade, after a moment's pause, proposed that they should enjoy the coolness of the evening breeze which had arisen, and, dismissing their steeds and attendants, walk homewards to their own quarters, through the lines of the extended Christian camp. The Grand Master assented, and they proceeded to walk together accordingly, where they could converse in private.

They spoke for a time upon the military points and preparations for defence; but this sort of discourse, in

which neither seemed to take interest, at length died away, and there was a long pause, which terminated by the Marquis of Montserrat stopping short, like a man who has formed a sudden resolution, and, gazing for some moments on the dark inflexible countenance of the Grand Master, he at length addressed him thus :—

"Ere this physician, if he work by any thing short of miraculous agency, can accomplish Richard's cure, it may be possible to put some open rupture betwixt the Frenchman, at least the Austrian, and his allies of England, so that the breach shall be irreconcilable; and Richard may arise from his bed, perhaps to command his own native troops, but never again, by his sole energy, to wield the force of the whole Crusade."

"Thou art a willing archer," said the Templar; "but, Conrade of Montserrat, thy bow is over slack to carry an arrow to the mark."

He then stopped short, cast a suspicious glance to see that no one overheard him, and taking Conrade by the hand, pressed it eagerly as he looked the Italian in the face, and repeated slowly—"Richard arise from his bed, say'st thou ? —Conrade, he must never arise ! "

The Marquis of Montserrat started—"What !—spoke you of Richard of England—of Cœur de Lion—the champion of Christendom ? "

His cheek turned pale, and his knees trembled as he spoke. The Templar looked at him, with his iron visage contorted into a smile of contempt.

"I grant you," said Conrade, recovering himself, "that—unless some other sure road could be discovered —thou hast hinted at that which leads most direct to our purpose. But we shall become the curse of all Europe, the malediction of every one, from the Pope on his throne to the very beggar at the church-gate, who, in the last extremity of human wretchedness, shall bless

himself that he is neither Giles Amaury, nor Conrade of Montserrat."

"If thou takest it thus," said the Grand Master, with the same composure which characterised him all through this remarkable dialogue, "let us hold there has nothing passed between us—that we have spoken in our sleep—have awakened, and the vision is gone."

"It never can depart," answered Conrade, "let me but first try to break peace between Austria and England."

They parted.—Conrade remained standing still upon the spot, and watching the flowing white cloak of the Templar, as he stalked slowly away, and gradually disappeared amid the fast-sinking darkness, of the Oriental night. Proud, ambitious, unscrupulous, and politic, the Marquis of Montserrat was yet not cruel by nature.

He said, as his eyes still watched the point at which he had seen the last slight wave of the Templar's mantle,—"Who would have thought this stern Grand Master, whose whole fortune and misfortune is merged in that of his order, would be willing to do more for its advancement, than I who labour for my own interest! To check this wild Crusade was my motive, indeed, but I durst not think on the ready mode which this determined priest has dared to suggest—yet it is the surest—perhaps even the safest."

Such were the Marquis's meditations, when his muttered soliloquy was broken by a voice from a little distance, which proclaimed with the emphatic tone of a herald,—"Remember the Holy Sepulchre!"

The exhortation was echoed from post to post, for it was the duty of the sentinels to raise this cry from time to time upon their periodical watch, that the host of the Crusaders might always have in their remembrance the purpose of their being in arms. But though Conrade was

familiar with the custom, and had heard the warning voice on all former occasions as a matter of habit; yet it came at the present moment so strongly in contact with his own train of thought, that it seemed a voice from Heaven warning him against the iniquity which his heart meditated. He looked around anxiously.

As he looked, the broad folds of the ensign of England, heavily distending itself to the failing night-breeze, caught his eye. It was displayed upon an artificial mound, nearly in the midst of the camp, which the Crusaders had christened Saint George's Mount, because from that commanding height the banner of England was displayed, as if an emblem of sovereignty over the many distinguished, noble, and even royal ensigns, which floated in lower situations.

A quick intellect like that of Conrade catches ideas from the glance of a moment. A single look on the standard seemed to dispel the uncertainty of mind which had affected him. He walked to his pavilion with the hasty and determined step of one who has adopted a plan which he is resolved to achieve, and, as he committed himself to his couch, muttered his amended resolution, that the milder means are to be tried before the more desperate are resorted to.

"To-morrow," he said, "I visit the Archduke of Austria—we will see what can be done to advance our purpose, before prosecuting the dark suggestions of this Templar."

[The crafty Marquis persuaded the Archduke that King Richard had insulted him, and encouraged Leopold to plant his own banner beside that of England.]

IX

RICHARD'S RECOVERY—THE INSULT TO HIS STANDARD

THE critical hour had arrived, at which the physician, according to the rules of his art, had predicted that his royal patient might be awakened with safety, and the sponge had been applied for that purpose. The leech had not made many observations ere he assured the Baron of Gilsland that the fever had entirely left his sovereign, and that such was the happy strength of his constitution, it would not be even necessary, as in most cases, to give a second dose of the powerful medicine. Richard himself seemed to be of the same opinion, for, sitting up and rubbing his eyes, he demanded of De Vaux what present sum of money was in the royal coffers.

The baron could not exactly inform him of the amount.

"It matters not," said Richard; "be it greater or smaller, bestow it all on this learned leech, who hath, I trust, given me back again to the service of the Crusade. If it be less than a thousand byzants, let him have jewels to make it up."

"I sell not the wisdom with which Allah has endowed me," answered the Arabian physician; "and be it known to you, great Prince, that the divine medicine, of which you have partaken, would lose its effects in my unworthy hands, did I exchange its virtues either for gold or diamonds. But now, let me pray you again to compose yourself on your couch; for though I think there needs no farther repetition of the divine draught, yet injury might ensue from any too early exertion, ere your strength be entirely restored."

"I must obey thee, Hakim," said the King; "yet believe me, my bosom feels so free from the wasting fire,

which for so many days hath scorched it, that I care not how soon I expose it to a brave man's lance.—But hark! what mean these shouts, and that distant music, in the camp? Go, Thomas de Vaux, and make inquiry."

"It is the Archduke Leopold," said De Vaux, returning after a minute's absence, "who makes with his pot-companions some procession through the camp."

"Can he not keep his brutal inebriety within the veil of his pavilion, that he must needs show his shame to all Christendom?" exclaimed King Richard.—"What say you, Sir Marquis?" he added, addressing himself to Conrade of Montserrat, who at that moment entered the tent.

"Thus much, honoured Prince," answered the Marquis "that I delight to see your Majesty so well, and so far recovered."

De Vaux, who had got a little behind the King, now exerted himself, by look and sign, to make the Marquis understand that he should say nothing to Richard of what was passing without. But Conrade understood not, or heeded not, the prohibition.

"What the Archduke does," he said, "is of little consequence to any one, least of all to himself, since he probably knows not what he is acting—yet, to say truth, it is a gambol I should not like to share in, since he is pulling down the banner of England from Saint George's Mount in the centre of the camp yonder, and displaying his own in its stead."

"WHAT say'st thou?" said the King, in a tone which might have waked the dead.

"Nay," said the Marquis, "let it not chafe your Highness, that a fool should act according to his folly——"

"Speak not to me," said Richard, springing from his couch, and casting on his clothes with a despatch which seemed marvellous—"speak not to me, Lord Marquis!—

De Multon, I command thee speak not a word to me—he that breathes but a syllable, is no friend to Richard Plantagenet.—Hakim, be silent, I charge thee ! "

All this while the King was hastily clothing himself, and, with the last word, snatched his sword from the pillar of the tent, and without any other weapon, or calling any attendance, he rushed out of the tent. Conrade holding up his hands, as if in astonishment, seemed willing to enter into conversation with De Vaux, but Sir Thomas pushed rudely past him, and calling to one of the royal equerries, said hastily,—" Fly to Lord Salisbury's quarters, and let him get his men together, and follow me instantly to Saint George's Mount. Tell him the King's fever has left his blood, and settled in his brain."

Imperfectly heard, and still more imperfectly comprehended, by the startled attendant whom De Vaux addressed thus hastily, the equerry and his fellow servants of the royal chamber rushed hastily into the tents of the neighbouring nobility, and quickly spread an alarm through the whole British forces. The English soldiers, waked in alarm from that noon-day rest which the heat of the climate had taught them to enjoy as a luxury, hastily asked each other the cause of the tumult and, without waiting an answer, supplied by the force of their own fancy the want of information. Some said the Saracens were in the camp, some that the King's life was attempted, some that he had died of the fever the preceding night, many that he was assassinated by the Duke of Austria.

The English trumpets sounded loud, shrill, and continuously. The alarm-cry of " Bows and bills—bows and bills ! " was heard from quarter to quarter, again and again shouted, and again and again answered by the presence of the ready warriors, and their national invocation, " Saint George for Merry England ! "

The alarm went through the nearest quarter of the camp, and men of all the various nations assembled where, perhaps, every people in Christendom had their representatives, flew to arms, and drew together under circumstances of general confusion, of which they knew neither the cause nor the object.

In the meanwhile, without regarding for one instant the shouts, the cries, the tumult, which began to thicken around him, Richard, with his dress in the last disorder, and his sheathed blade under his arm, pursued his way with the utmost speed, followed only by De Vaux, and one or two household servants, to Saint George's Mount.

He outsped even the alarm which his impetuosity only had excited, and passed the quarter of his own gallant troops of Normandy, Poitou, Gascony, and Anjou, before the disturbance had reached them. The handful of Scots were also quartered in the vicinity, nor had they been disturbed by the uproar. But the King's person, and his haste, were both remarked by the Knight of the Leopard, who, aware that danger must be afoot, and hastening to share in it, snatched his shield and sword, and united himself to De Vaux, who with some difficulty kept with his impatient and fiery master.

X

KING RICHARD AVENGES THE INSULT

THE King was soon at the foot of Saint George's Mount, the sides as well as platform of which were now surrounded and crowded, partly by those belonging to the Duke of Austria's retinue, partly by bystanders of different nations, whom dislike to the English, or mere curiosity, had assembled together, to witness the end of

these extraordinary proceedings. Through this disorderly troop Richard burst his way.

The summit of the eminence was a small level space, on which were pitched the rival banners, surrounded still by the Archduke's friends and retinue. In the midst of the circle was Leopold himself, contemplating with self-satisfaction his own standard which, persuaded by the crafty Montserrat, he had placed beside that of England, and still listening to the shouts of applause which his partisans bestowed with no sparing breath.

While he was in this state of self-gratulation, Richard burst into the circle, attended, indeed, only by two men, but in his own headlong energies an irresistible host.

"Who has dared," he said, laying his hands upon the Austrian standard, and speaking in a voice like the sound which precedes an earthquake; "who has dared to place this paltry rag beside the banner of England?"

The Archduke wanted not personal courage, and it was impossible he could hear this question without reply. Yet. so much was he troubled and surprised by the unexpected arrival of Richard, that the demand was twice repeated, in a tone which seemed to challenge heaven and earth, ere the Archduke replied with such firmness as he could command, "It was I, Leopold of Austria."

"Then shall Leopold of Austria," replied Richard, "presently see the rate at which his banner and his pretensions are held by Richard of England."

So saying, he pulled up the standard-spear, splintered it to pieces, threw the banner itself on the ground, and placed his foot upon it.

"Thus," said he, "I trample on the banner of Austria. Is there a knight among your Teutonic chivalry dare impeach my deed?"

There was a momentary silence; but there are no braver men than the Germans.

"I," and "I," and "I," was heard from several knights of the Duke's followers; and he himself added his voice to those which accepted the King of England's defiance.

"Why do we dally thus?" said the Earl Wallenrode, a gigantic warrior from the frontiers of Hungary: "Brethren, and noble gentlemen, this man's foot is on the honour of your country. Let us rescue it from violation, and down with the pride of England!"

So saying, he drew his sword, and struck at the King a blow which might have proved fatal, had not the Scot intercepted and caught it upon his shield.

"I have sworn," said King Richard—and his voice was heard above all the tumult, which now waxed wild and loud—"never to strike one whose shoulder bears the cross; therefore live, Wallenrode—but live to remember Richard of England."

As he spoke, he grasped the tall Hungarian round the waist, and, unmatched in wrestling, as in other military exercises, hurled him backwards with such violence that the mass flew, as if discharged from a military engine, not only through the ring of spectators who witnessed the extraordinary scene, but over the edge of the mount itself, down the steep side of which Wallenrode rolled headlong, until, pitching at length upon his shoulder, he dislocated the bone, and lay like one dead.

This almost supernatural display of strength did not encourage either the Duke or any of his followers to renew a personal contest so inauspiciously commenced. Those who stood farthest back did, indeed, clash their swords, and cry out, "Cut the island mastiff to pieces!" but those who were nearer, veiled, perhaps, their personal fears under an affected regard for order, and cried, for the most part, "Peace! peace! the peace of the Cross!"

These various cries of the assailants, contradicting each other, showed their irresolution; while Richard, his foot

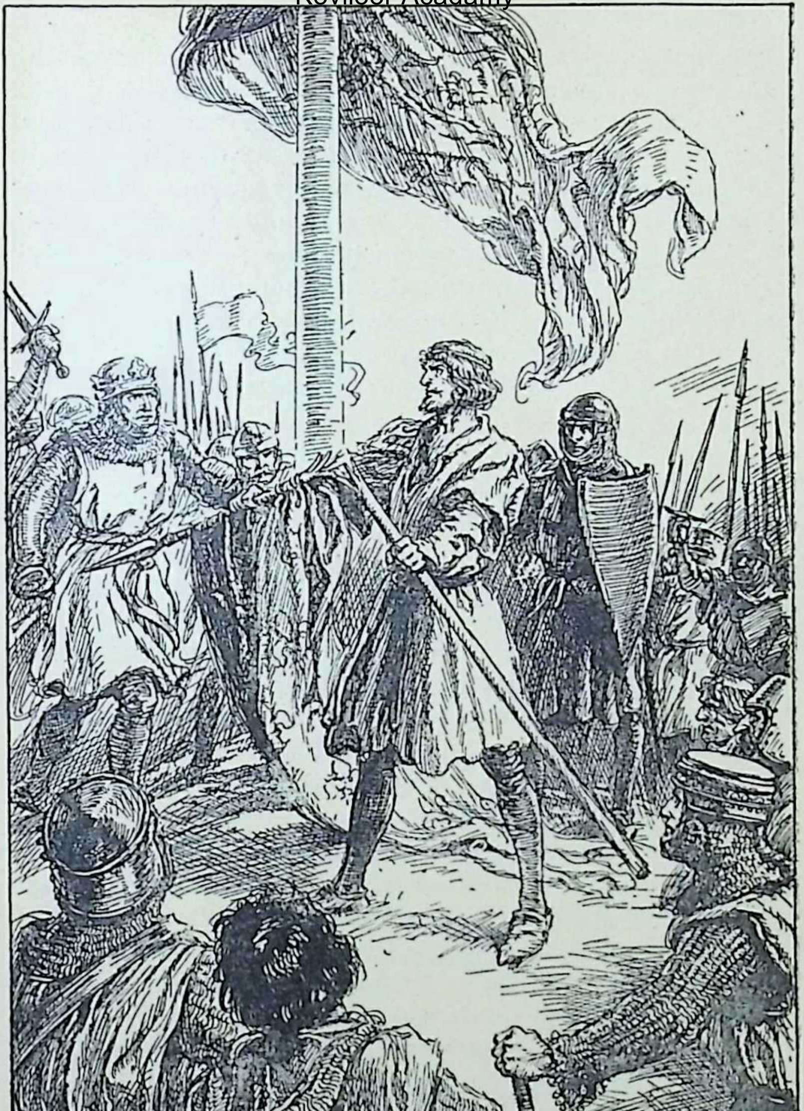
still on the Archducal banner, glared round him, with an eye that seemed to seek an enemy, and from which the angry nobles shrunk appalled, as from the threatened grasp of a lion. De Vaux and the Knight of the Leopard kept their places beside him ; and though the swords which they held were still sheathed, it was plain that they were prompt to protect Richard's person to the very last, and their size and remarkable strength plainly showed the defence would be a desperate one.

Salisbury and his attendants were also now drawing near, with bills brandished, and bows already bended.

At this moment, King Philip of France, attended by one or two of his nobles, came on the platform to inquire the cause of the disturbance, and made gestures of surprise at finding the King of England raised from his sick-bed, and confronting their common ally the Duke of Austria, in such a menacing and insulting posture. Richard himself blushed at being discovered by Philip, whose sagacity he respected as much as he disliked his person, in an attitude neither becoming his character as a monarch, nor as a Crusader ; and exchanged his look of violent emotion for one of affected composure and indifference.

The King of France was dignified and royal in his deportment, brave in person, but a politician rather than a warrior. In any other situation, or in a milder age, his character might have stood higher than that of the adventurous Cœur de Lion. But in the Crusade, itself an undertaking wholly irrational, sound reason was the quality, of all others, least estimated.

Philip felt his inferiority in public opinion, with the pain natural to a high-spirited prince ; and it cannot be wondered at if he took such opportunities as offered for placing his own character in more advantageous contrast with that of his rival. The present seemed one of those occasions, in which prudence and calmness might



RICHARD TEARS DOWN LEOPOLD'S BANNER.

reasonably expect to triumph over obstinacy and impetuous violence.

"What means this unseemly broil betwixt the sworn brethren of the Cross—the royal Majesty of England and the princely Duke Leopold? How is it possible that those who are the chiefs and pillars of this holy expedition——"

"A truce with thy remonstrance, France," said Richard, enraged inwardly at finding himself placed on a sort of equality with Leopold, yet not knowing how to resent it,—" this duke, or prince, or pillar, if you will, hath been insolent, and I have chastised him—that is all."

"Majesty of France," said the Duke, "I appeal to you and every sovereign prince against the foul indignity which I have sustained, This King of England hath pulled down my banner—torn and trampled on it."

"Because he had the audacity to plant it beside mine," said Richard.

"My rank as thine equal entitled me," replied the Duke, emboldened by the presence of Philip.

"Assert such equality for thy person," said King Richard, "and, by Saint George, I will treat thy person as I did thy broidered kerchief there, fit but for the meanest use to which kerchief may be put."

"Nay, but patience, brother of England," said Philip, "and I will presently show Austria that he is wrong in this matter.—Do not think, noble Duke," he continued, "that, in permitting the standard of England to occupy the highest point in our camp, we, the independent sovereigns of the Crusade, acknowledge any inferiority to the royal Richard. It were inconsistent to think so; since even the great banner of France, to which the royal Richard himself, in respect of his French possessions, is but a vassal—holds for the present an inferior place to the Lions of England. But as sworn brethren of the Cross,

military pilgrims, who, laying aside the pomp and pride of this world, are hewing with our swords the way to the Holy Sepulchre, I myself, and the other princes, have renounced to King Richard, from respect to his high renown and great feats of arms, that precedence, which elsewhere, and upon other motives, would not have been yielded. I am satisfied, that when your royal grace of Austria shall have considered this, you will express sorrow for having placed your banner on this spot, and that the royal Majesty of England will then give satisfaction for the insult he has offered."

The Duke answered sullenly, that he would refer his quarrel to the General Council of the Crusade—a motion which Philip highly applauded, as qualified to take away a scandal most harmful to Christendom.

Richard, retaining the same careless attitude, said aloud,— "Brother of France, thou art acquainted with my humour, and that I have at all times but few words to spare—know, therefore, at once, I will submit a matter touching the honour of England neither to Prince, Pope, nor Council. Here stands my banner—whatsoever pennon shall be reared within three butts' length of it, shall be treated as that dishonoured rag; nor will I yield other satisfaction than that which these poor limbs can render in the lists to any bold challenge—ay, were it against five champions instead of one."

Philip answered calmly to the almost injurious defiance of Richard,—"I came not hither to awaken fresh quarrels. contrary to the holy cause in which we have engaged. I part from my brother of England as brothers should part, and the only strife between the Lions of England and the Lilies of France shall be, which shall be carried deepest into the ranks of the infidels."

"It is a bargain, my royal brother," said Richard, stretching out his hand with all the frankness which

belonged to his rash but generous disposition; "and soon may we have the opportunity to try this gallant and fraternal wager!"

"Let this noble Duke also partake in the friendship of this happy moment," said Philip; and the Duke approached half-sullenly, half-willing to enter into some accommodation.

"I think not of fools, nor of their folly," said Richard carelessly; and the Archduke, turning his back on him, withdrew from the ground.

Richard looked after him as he retired.

"There is a sort of glow-worm courage," he said, "that shows only by night. I must not leave this banner unguarded in darkness—by daylight the look of the Lions will alone defend it. Here, Thomas of Gilsland, I give thee the charge of the standard—watch over the honour of England."

"Her safety is yet more dear to me," said De Vaux, "and the life of Richard is the safety of England—I must have your Highness back to your tent, and that without further tarrying."

"Thou art a rough and peremptory nurse, De Vaux," said the King, smiling, and then added, addressing Sir Kenneth, "Valiant Scot, I owe thee a boon, and I will pay it richly. There stands the banner of England! Watch it as a novice does his armour on the night before he is dubbed—Stir not from it three spears length, and defend it with thy body against injury or insult—Sound thy bugle, if thou art assailed by more than three at once. Dost thou undertake the charge?"

"Willingly," said Kenneth; "and will discharge it upon penalty of my head. I will but arm me and return hither instantly."

The Kings of France and England then took formal leave of each other, hiding under an appearance of

courtesy, the grounds of complaint which either had against the other,—Richard against Philip, for what he deemed an officious interference betwixt him and Austria, and Philip against Cœur de Lion, for the disrespectful manner in which his mediation had been received. Those whom this disturbance had assembled, now drew off in different directions, leaving the contested mount in the same solitude which had subsisted till interrupted by the Austrian bravado.

XI

SIR KENNETH GUARDS THE BANNER

It was midnight, and the moon rode clear and high in heaven, when Kenneth of Scotland stood upon his watch on St. George's Mount, beside the banner of England, a solitary sentinel, to protect the emblem of that nation against the insults which might be meditated among the thousands whom Richard's pride had made his enemies. High thoughts rolled, one after another, upon the mind of the warrior. It seemed to him as if he had gained some favour in the eyes of the chivalrous monarch, and Sir Kenneth little recked that the display of royal regard consisted in placing him upon a post so perilous. The devotion of his ambitious and high-placed affection inflamed his military enthusiasm.

An unknown and obscure fate could not now be his. If he was surprised and slain on the post which had been assigned him, his death—and he resolved it should be glorious—must deserve the praises, as well as call down the vengeance, of Cœur de Lion, and be followed by the regrets, and even the tears, of the high-born beauties of the English Court.

Sir Kenneth had full leisure to enjoy these and similar high-souled thoughts. All nature around him slept in calm moonshine, or in deep shadow. The long rows of tents and pavilions, glimmering or darkening as they lay in the moonlight or in the shade, were still and silent as the streets of a deserted city.

Beside the banner-staff lay the large stag-hound who was the sole companion of Kenneth's watch, and on whose vigilance he trusted for early warning of the approach of any hostile footstep. The noble animal seemed to understand the purpose of their watch, for he looked from time to time at the rich folds of the heavy pennon. From time to time also he lowered his lofty head, and wagged his tail, as his master passed and re-passed him in the short turns which he took upon his post. At length, and upon a sudden, the gallant stag-hound bayed furiously, and seemed about to dash forward where the shadow lay the darkest, yet waited, as if in the slips, till he should know the pleasure of his master.

"Who goes there?" said Sir Kenneth, aware that there was something creeping forward on the shadowy side of the mount.

"Tie up your four-footed demon there, or I come not at you," answered a hoarse, disagreeable voice.

"And who art thou, that would approach my post?" said Sir Kenneth. "Beware—I am here for death and life. Come into the moonlight, or, by St. Andrew, I will pin thee to the earth, be what or whom thou wilt!"

As he spoke, he poised his long lance by the middle, and brandished the weapon, as if meditating to cast it from his hand, when there stepped from the shadow into the moon-light, like an actor entering upon the stage, a stunted decrepit creature, whom, by his fantastic dress and deformity, he recognised, even at some distance, for the male of two dwarfs whom he had seen when at the

chapel of Engaddi. Recollecting, at the same moment, the other, and far different, visions of that extraordinary night, he gave his dog a signal, which he instantly understood, and, returning to the standard, laid himself down beside it with a stifled growl.

The little distorted miniature of humanity, assured of his safety from an enemy so formidable, came panting up the ascent, which the shortness of his legs rendered laborious, and arrived on the platform on the top.

"Soldier," said Nectabanus, "attend me to the presence of those who have sent me hither to summon you."

"Sir," replied the knight, "my orders are to abide by this banner till daybreak—so I pray you to hold me excused."

So saying, he resumed his walk upon the platform ; but the dwarf did not suffer him so easily to escape from his importunity.

"Look," he said, placing himself before Sir Kenneth, so as to interrupt his way, "look thou here, and as thou knowest or disownest this token, so obey or refuse her commands, who hath deigned to impose them on thee."

So saying, he placed in the knight's hands a ruby ring, which, even in the moonlight, he had no difficulty to recognise as that which usually graced the finger of the high-born lady to whose service he had devoted himself. Could he have doubted the truth of the token, he would have been convinced by the small knot of carnation-coloured ribbon, which was fastened to the ring. This was his lady's favourite colour.

Sir Kenneth was struck nearly mute, by seeing such a token in such hands.

"In the name of all that is sacred, from whom didst thou receive this witness ?" said the knight. "Tell me the person by whom thou art sent, and the real purpose of

thy message—and take heed what thou say'st, for this is no subject for buffoonery."

"Fond and foolish knight," said the dwarf, "would'st thou know more of this matter, than that thou art honoured with commands from a princess ? We list not to parley with thee further than to command thee, in the name, and by the power of that ring, to follow us to her who is the owner of the ring. Every minute that thou tarriest is a crime against thy allegiance."

"Good Nectabanus—bethink thyself," said the knight, —"Can my lady know where and upon what duty I am this night engaged ?—Is she aware that my life—Pshaw, why should I speak of life—but that my honour depends on my guarding this banner till daybreak—and can it be her wish that I should leave it even to pay homage to her ?—It is impossible—the princess is pleased to be merry with her servant, in sending him such a message ; and I must think so the rather that she hath chosen such a messenger."

"Oh, keep your belief," said Nectabanus, turning round as if to leave the platform ; "it is little to me whether you be traitor or true man to this royal lady."

The knight gazed again on the ring, as if to ascertain that there was no possible falsehood in the token.—"Tell me," he said to the dwarf, "is my presence required for any length of time ?"

"Time !" answered Nectabanus, in his flighty manner ; "what call you time ? Know'st thou not a true knight's time could only be reckoned by the deeds that he performs in behalf of God and his lady ?"

"The words of truth, though in the mouth of folly," said the knight. "And doth my lady really summon me to some deed of action, in her name and for her sake ?—and may it not be postponed for even the few hours till daybreak ?"

"She requires thy presence instantly," said the dwarf, "and without the loss of so much time as would be told by ten grains of the sand-glass.—Hearken, thou cold-blooded and suspicious knight, these are her very words—'Tell him, that the hand which dropped roses can bestow laurels.'"

This allusion to their meeting in the chapel at Engaddi sent a thousand recollections through Sir Kenneth's brain, and convinced him that the message delivered by the dwarf was genuine. The rose-buds, withered as they were, were still treasured under his armour, and nearest to his heart. He paused, and could not resolve to forego an opportunity—the only one which might ever offer—to gain grace in her eyes, whom he had installed as sovereign of his affections. The dwarf, in the meantime, augmented his confusion by insisting either that he must return the ring, or instantly attend him.

"The ring! the ring!" exclaimed the dwarf impatiently; "false and slothful knight, return the ring, which thou art unworthy to touch or to look upon."

"A moment, a moment, good Nectabanus," said Sir Kenneth; "disturb not my thoughts.—What if the Saracens were just now to attack our lines? Should I stay here like a sworn vassal of England, watching that her king's pride suffered no humiliation; or should I speed to the breach and fight for the Cross?—To the breach, assuredly; and next to the cause of God, come the commands of my liege lady. And yet Cœur de Lion's behest—my own promise!—Nectabanus, I conjure thee once more to say, are you to conduct me far from hence!"

"But to yonder pavilion," replied Nectabanus.

"I can return in an instant," said the knight, shutting his eyes desperately to all further consequences. "I can hear from thence the bay of my dog, if any one approaches the standard—I will throw myself at my lady's feet, and

pray her leave to return to conclude my watch.—Here, Roswal" (calling his hound, and throwing down his mantle by the side of the standard-spear), "watch thou here, and let no one approach."

The majestic dog looked in his master's face, as if to be sure that he understood his charge, then sat down beside the mantle, with ears erect and head raised, like a sentinel, understanding perfectly the purpose for which he was stationed there.

"Come now, my good Nectabanus," said the knight, "let us hasten to obey the commands thou hast brought."

Nectabanus led the knight in silence to the opposite side of the pavilion, which thus screened them from the observation of the warders, who seemed either too negligent or too sleepy to discharge their duty with much accuracy. Arrived there, the dwarf raised the under part of the canvas from the ground, and made signs to Sir Kenneth that he should introduce himself to the inside of the tent, by creeping under it. The knight hesitated; but he recalled to remembrance the assured tokens which the dwarf had exhibited, and concluded that it was not for him to dispute his lady's pleasure.

He stooped accordingly, crept beneath the canvas enclosure of the tent, and heard the dwarf whisper from without,—"Remain there till I call thee."

XII

SIR KENNETH IS DECEIVED

Sir Kenneth was left for some minutes alone, and in darkness. Here was another interruption, which must prolong his absence from his post, and he began almost to repent the facility with which he had been induced to quit

it. But to return without seeing the Lady Edith, was now not to be thought of. He had committed a breach of military discipline, and was determined at least to prove the reality of the expectations which had tempted him to do so. Meanwhile, his situation was unpleasant. There was no light to show him into what sort of apartment he had been led—the Lady Edith was in immediate attendance on the Queen of England—and the discovery of his having introduced himself thus furtively into the royal pavilion, might, were it discovered, lead to much and dangerous suspicion.

While he gave way to these unpleasant reflections, and began almost to wish that he could achieve his retreat unobserved, he heard a noise of female voices, laughing, whispering, and speaking, in an adjoining apartment, from which, as the sounds gave him reason to judge, he could only be separated by a canvas partition. It cannot be termed discourtesy in Sir Kenneth, that, situated as he was, he overheard a conversation, in which he found himself deeply interested

"Call her—call her," said the voice of one of these laughing invisibles. "Nectabanus, thou shalt be made ambassador, to show how wisely thou canst discharge thee of a mission. But how shall we rid us of the spirit which Nectabanus hath raised, my maidens?"

"Truly," said another speaker, "our Cousin Edith must first learn how this vaunted wight hath conducted himself, and that he hath failed in his duty. It may be a lesson will do good upon her; for, credit me, Calista, I have sometimes thought she has let this northern adventurer sit nearer her heart than prudence would sanction. But here she comes."

A figure, as if entering the apartment, cast upon the partition a shade, which glided along slowly until it mixed with those which already clouded it. Despite of the

bitter disappointment which he had experienced—despite the insult and injury with which it seemed he had been visited by the malice, or, at best, by the idle humour of Queen Berengaria (for he already concluded that she who spoke loudest, and in a commanding tone, was the wife of Richard), the knight felt something soothing to his feelings in learning that Edith had been no partner to the fraud practised on him.

It seemed as if Edith were waiting for the commands of the Queen, and as if the other were reluctant to speak, for fear of being able to command her laughter, and that of her companions ; for Sir Kenneth could only distinguish a sound as of suppressed tittering and merriment.

" Your Majesty," said Edith at last, " seems in a merry mood, though, methinks, the hour of night prompts a sleepy one. I was well disposed bedwards, when I had your Majesty's commands to attend you."

" I will not long delay you, cousin, from your repose," said the Queen ; " though I fear you will sleep less soundly when I tell you your wager is lost."

" Nay, royal madam," said Edith, " I laid no wager; however, it was your Majesty's pleasure to suppose, or to insist, that I did so."

" Nay, my gentle cousin. Can you deny that you gaged your ruby ring against my golden bracelet, that yonder Knight of the Libbard, or how call you him, could not be seduced from his post ? "

" Your Majesty is too great for me to gainsay you," replied Edith ; " but these ladies can, if they will, bear me witness, that it was your highness who proposed such a wager, and took the ring from my finger, even while I was declaring that I did not think it maidenly to gage any thing on such a subject."

" Nay, but my Lady Edith," said another voice, " you must needs grant, under your favour, that you expressed

yourself very confident of the valour of that same Knight of the Leopard."

"And if I did, minion," said Edith angrily, "is that a good reason why thou should'st put in thy word to flatter her Majesty's humour?"

"Silence, Florise," said the Queen, "and let not our indulgence lead you to forget the difference betwixt yourself and the kinswoman of England. But you, my dear cousin," she continued, resuming her tone of raillery, "how can you, who are so good-natured, begrudge us poor wretches a few minutes' laughing?"

"Great be your mirth, royal lady," said Edith; "yet would I be content not to smile for the rest of my life, rather than—"

She stopped, apparently out of respect; but Sir Kenneth could hear that she was in much agitation.

"Forgive me," said Berengaria, a thoughtless but good-humoured princess of the House of Navarre,—"but what is the great offence after all? A young knight has been wiled hither—has stolen—or has *been* stolen—from his post, which no one will disturb in his absence, for the sake of a fair lady; for, to do your champion justice, sweet one, the wisdom of Nectabanus could conjure him hither in no name but yours."

"Gracious Heaven! your Majesty does not say so?" said Edith, in a voice of alarm quite different from the agitation she had previously evinced; "you cannot say so, consistently with respect for your own honour and for mine, your husband's kinswoman!"

"You are angry, fair cousin, at losing your favourite ring," said the Queen. "Come, since you grudge to pay your wager, we will renounce our right; it was your name and that pledge brought him hither, and we care not for the bait after the fish is caught."

"Madam," replied Edith impatiently, "you know well

that your Grace could not wish for anything of mine but it becomes instantly yours. But I would give a bushel of rubies ere ring or name of mine had been used to bring a brave man into a fault, and perhaps to disgrace and punishment."

"Oh, is it for the safety of our true knight that we fear!" said the Queen. "You rate our power too low, fair cousin, when you speak of a life being lost for a frolic of ours. Oh, Lady Edith, others have influence on the iron breasts of warriors as well as you—the heart even of a lion is made of flesh, and not of stone; and, believe me, I have interest enough with Richard to save this knight, in whose faith Lady Edith is so deeply concerned, from the penalty of disobeying his royal commands."

"For the love of the blessed Cross, most royal lady," said Edith—and Sir Kenneth, with feelings which it were hard to unravel, heard her prostrate herself at the Queen's feet,—"beware what you do! You know not King Richard—you have been but shortly wedded to him—your breath might as well combat the west wind when it is wildest, as your words persuade my royal kinsman to pardon a military offence."

"Arise, cousin, arise," said Queen Berengaria, "and be assured all will be better than you think. Rise, dear Edith; I tell thee I will take the blame on myself with King Richard in behalf of thy fair northern friend—thine acquaintance, I would say, since thou own'st him not as a friend—Nay, look not so reproachfully.—We will send Nectabanus to dismiss this Knight of the Standard to his post; and we ourselves will grace him on some future day, to make amends for his wild-goose chase. He is, I warrant, in some neighbouring tent."

"Your Majesty is mistaken," said Nectabanus, "he is nearer at hand than you wot—he lieth hidden there behind that canvas partition!"

"And within hearing of each word we have said!" exclaimed the Queen, in her turn violently surprised and agitated—"Out, monster of folly and malignity!"

As she uttered these words, Nectabanus fled from the pavilion with a yell of such a nature, as leaves it still doubtful whether Berengaria had confined her rebuke to words, or added some more emphatic expression of her displeasure.

"What can be done now?" said the Queen to Edith, in a whisper of undisguised uneasiness.

"That which must," said Edith firmly. "We must see this gentleman, and place ourselves in his mercy."

So saying, she began hastily to undo a curtain, which at one place covered an entrance of communication.

"For Heaven's sake, forbear—consider," said the Queen, "my apartment—our dress—the hour—my honour!"

But ere she could detail her remonstrances, the curtain fell, and there was no division any longer betwixt the armed knight and the party of ladies. The warmth of an Eastern night occasioned the undress of Queen Berengaria and her household to be rather more simple and unstudied than their station, and the presence of a male spectator of rank, required. This the Queen remembered, and with a loud shriek fled from the apartment where Sir Kenneth was disclosed to view.

But although Edith felt her situation with all that delicacy which is her sex's greatest charm, it did not seem that for a moment she placed her own bashfulness in comparison with the duty, which, as she thought, she owed to him, who had been led into error and danger on her account.

While Sir Kenneth stood motionless on the same spot in which he was first discovered, she rather stepped towards than retired from him, as she exclaimed, "Hasten

to your post, valiant knight! you are deceived in being trained hither—ask no questions."

"I need ask none," said the knight, sinking upon one knee, with reverential devotion, "I have heard that I am dishonoured, lady, and I have heard it from you. What reck I how soon punishment follows? I have but one petition to you, and then I seek, among the sabres of the infidels, whether dishonour may not be washed out with blood."

"Do not so," said the lady. "Be wise—dally not here—all may yet be well, if you will but use despatch."

"I wait but for your forgiveness for my presumption in believing my poor services could have been required or valued by you."

"I do forgive you—Oh, I have nothing to forgive!—I have been the means of injuring you—But oh, begone!—I will forgive—I will value you—that is, as I value every brave Crusader—if you will but begone!"

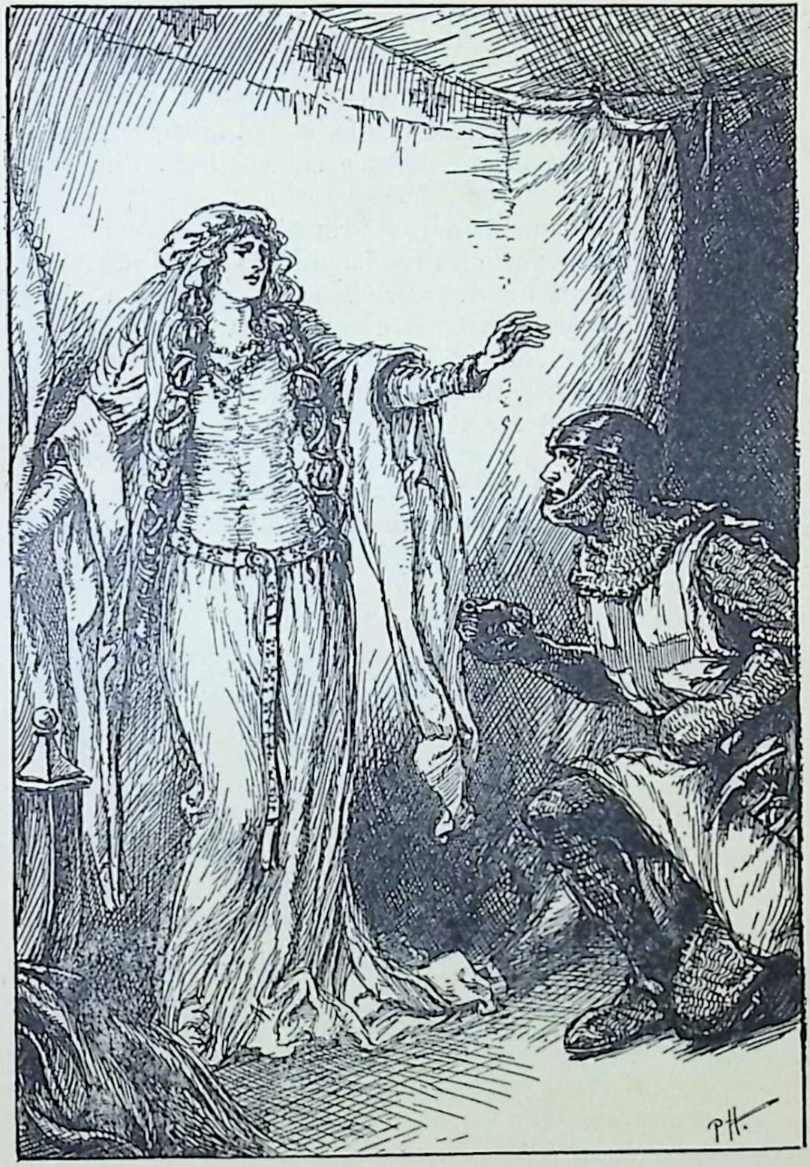
"Receive, first, this precious yet fatal pledge," said the knight, tendering the ring to Edith, who now showed gestures of impatience.

"Oh, no, no," she said, declining to receive it. "Keep it—keep it as a mark of my regard—my regret, I would say. Oh, begone, if not for your own sake, for mine!"

Sir Kenneth rose from his knee, and, casting a momentary glance on Edith, bowed low.

At the same instant, Edith hastened from the apartment, and he to the place by which he had entered the pavilion.

When in the free air, he felt rather stupified and overpowered by a conflict of sensations, than able to ascertain what was the real import of the whole. He was compelled to move slowly, and with precaution, to avoid giving an alarm, either by falling, or by the clashing of his armour. A thin cloud had obscured the moon, too, at the very



EDITH AND SIR KENNETH

instant of his leaving the tent, and Sir Kenneth had to struggle with this inconvenience at a moment when the dizziness of his head, and the fulness of his heart, scarce left him powers of intelligence sufficient to direct his motions.

But sounds came upon his ear, which instantly recalled him to the full energy of his faculties. These proceeded from the Mount of St. George. He heard first a single fierce, angry and savage bark, which was immediately followed by a yell of agony. No deer ever bounded with a wilder start at the voice of Roswal, than did Sir Kenneth at what he feared was the death-cry of that noble hound. He began to run towards the mount, although loaded with his mail, faster than most men could have accompanied him even if unarmed, and in a few minutes stood on the platform upon its summit.

The moon broke through the cloud at this moment, and showed him that the standard of England was vanished, that the spear on which it floated lay broken on the ground and beside it was his faithful hound, apparently in the agonies of death.

XIII

DISHONOUR

AFTER a torrent of afflicting sensations, by which he was at first almost stunned and confounded, Sir Kenneth's first thought was to look for the authors of this violation of the English banner; but in no direction could he see traces of them. His next was to examine the condition of his faithful Roswal, mortally wounded, as it seemed, in discharging the duty which his master had been seduced to abandon. He caressed the dying animal, who, faithful

to the last, seemed to forget his own pain in the satisfaction he received from his master's presence, and continued wagging his tail and licking his hand, even while by low moanings he expressed his agony.

There was something in the display of the dying creature's attachment, which mixed as a bitter ingredient with the sense of disgrace and desolation by which Sir Kenneth was oppressed. His only friend seemed removed from him, just when he had incurred the contempt and hatred of all besides. The knight's strength of mind gave way to a burst of agonised distress, and he groaned and wept aloud.

While he thus indulged his grief, a clear and solemn voice beside him, pronounced these words in the sonorous tone of the reader of the mosque, and in the lingua Franca, mutually understood by Christians and Saracens :—

"Adversity is like the period of the former and of the latter rain—cold, comfortless, unfriendly to man and to animal ; yet from that season have their birth the flower and the fruit, the date, the rose, and the pomegranate."

Sir Kenneth of the Leopard turned towards the speaker, and beheld the Arabian physician.

Ashamed at being surprised in a woman-like expression of sorrow, Sir Kenneth dashed his tears indignantly aside, and again busied himself with his dying favourite.

"The poet hath said," continued the Arab, without noticing the knight's averted looks and sullen deportment —" 'the ox for the field, and the camel for the desert.' Were not the hand of the leech fitter than that of the soldier to cure wounds, though less able to inflict them ? Let me examine this wounded animal."

Sir Kenneth acceded in silence, and the physician withdrew from the wounded shoulder the fragment of the weapon, and stopped with bandages the effusion of blood

which followed; the creature all the while suffering him patiently to perform these kind offices, as if he had been aware of his kind intentions.

"The animal may be cured," said El Hakim, addressing himself to Sir Kenneth, "if you will permit me to carry him to my tent, and treat him with the care which the nobleness of his nature deserves."

"Take him with you," said the knight. "I bestow him on you freely if he recovers. I owe thee a reward for attendance on my squire and have nothing else to pay it with. For myself,—I will never again wind bugle, or halloo to hounds!"

The Arabian made no reply, but gave a signal with a clapping of his hands, which was instantly answered by the appearance of two black slaves. He gave them his orders in Arabic, received the answer, that "to hear was to obey," when, taking the animal in their arms, they removed him, without much resistance on his part; for, though his eyes turned to his master, he was too weak to struggle.

"Fare thee well, Roswal, then," said Sir Kenneth,—"fare thee well, my last and only friend—thou art too noble a possession to be retained by one such as I must in future call myself. I would," he said, as the slaves retired, "that, dying as he is, I could exchange condition with that noble animal."

"It is written," answered the Arabian, although the exclamation had not been addressed to him, "that all creatures are fashioned for the service of man; and the master of the earth speaketh folly when he would exchange in his impatience, his hopes here and to come, for the condition of an inferior being."

"A dog who dies in discharging his duty," said the knight, sternly, "is better than a man who survives the desertion of it. Leave me, Hakim; thou hast, on this

side of miracle, the most wonderful science which man ever possessed, but the wounds of the spirit are beyond thy power."

"Not if the patient will explain his calamity, and be guided by the physicians," said Adonbec El Hakim.

"Know, then," said Sir Kenneth, "since thou art so importunate, that last night the Banner of England was displayed from this mound—I was its appointed guardian—morning is now breaking—there lies the broken banner-spear—the standard itself is lost—and here sit I a living man."

"How!" said El Hakim, examining him; "thy armour is whole—there is no blood on thy weapons, and report speaks thee one unlikely to return thus from fight. Thou hast been trained from thy post—ay, trained by the rosy cheek and black eye of one of those houris,* to whom you Nazarenes vow such service. Use thy speed, and fly from the vengeance of Richard to the shadow of Saladin's victorious banner."

"I might indeed hide my dishonour," said Sir Kenneth, ironically, "in a camp of infidel heathens, where the very phrase is unknown. My choice were rather that my writhen features should blacken, as they are like to do, in this evening's setting sun."

"Thou art, then, wilfully determined not to fly to the Saracen host?" said the physician. "Yet, remember, thou stayest to certain destruction; and the writings of thy law, as well as ours, prohibit man from breaking into the tabernacle of his own life."

"God forbid!" replied the Scott, crossing himself; "but we are also forbidden to avoid the punishment which our crimes have deserved. My hours are fast dwindling into minutes—yet, while I have life and breath, something must be done, and speedily."

*Houri=nymph of paradise.

He paused for a few minutes, threw from him his helmet, then strode down the hill, and took the road to King Richard's pavilion.

XIV

THE KNIGHT'S CONFESSION

On the evening on which Sir Kenneth assumed his post, Richard had retired to rest in the confidence inspired by his unbounded courage and the superiority which he had displayed in carrying the point he aimed at in presence of the whole Christian host.

It was about the hour of sunrise, when a slow, armed tread was heard approaching the King's pavilion; and ere De Vaux, who slumbered beside his master's bed as lightly as ever sleep sat upon the eyes of a watch-dog, had time to do more than arise, and say, "Who comes?" the Knight of the Leopard entered the tent, with a deep and devoted gloom seated upon his manly features.

"Whence this bold intrusion, Sir Knight?" said De Vaux sternly, yet in a tone which respected his master's slumbers.

"Hold! De Vaux," said Richard, awakening on the instant; "Sir Kenneth cometh like a good soldier to render an account of his guard—to such the General's tent is ever accessible." Then rising from his slumbering posture, and leaning on his elbow, he fixed his large bright eye upon the warrior—"Speak, Sir Scot; thou comest to tell me of a vigilant, safe, and honourable watch, dost thou not? The rustling of the folds of the Banner of England were enough to guard it, even without the body of such a knight as men hold thee."

"As men will hold me no more," said Sir Kenneth—

"my watch hath neither been vigilant, safe, nor honourable. The Banner of England has been carried off."

"And thou alive to tell it?" said Richard, in a tone of derisive incredulity.—"Away, it cannot be. There is not even a scratch on thy face—Why dost thou stand thus mute? Speak the truth—it is ill jesting with a king—yet I will forgive thee if thou hast lied."

"Lied! Sir King!" returned the unfortunate knight, with fierce emphasis, and one glance of fire from his eyes, bright and transient as the flash from the cold and stony flint. "But this also must be endured—I have spoken the truth."

"By God, and by Saint George!" said the King, bursting into fury, which, however, he instantly checked—"De Vaux, go and view the spot—This fever has disturbed his brain—This cannot be—The man's courage is proof—It *cannot* be! Go speedily—or send, if thou wilt not go."

The King was interrupted by Sir Henry Neville, who came, breathless, to say that the banner was gone, and the knight who guarded it overpowered, and most probably murdered, as there was a pool of blood where the banner-spear lay shivered.

"But whom do I see here?" said Neville, his eyes suddenly resting upon Sir Kenneth.

"A traitor," said the King, starting to his feet, and seizing the curtal-axe, which was ever near his bed—"a traitor! whom thou shalt see die a traitor's death." And he drew back the weapon as in act to strike.

Colourless, but firm as a marble statue, the Scot stood before him, with his bare head uncovered by any protection, his eyes cast down to the earth, his lips scarcely moving, yet muttering probably in prayer. Opposite to him, and within the due reach for a blow, stood King Richard, his large person wrapped in the folds of his ample gown of linen, except where the violence of his action had

flung the covering from his right arm, shoulder, and a part of his breast. He stood for an instant, prompt to strike—then sinking the head of the weapon towards the ground, he exclaimed—

"But there was blood, Neville—there was blood upon the place. Hark thee, Sir Scot—brave thou wert once, for I have seen thee fight—Say thou hast slain two of the thieves in defence of the Standard—say but one—say thou hast struck but a good blow in our behalf, and get thee out of the camp with thy life and thy infamy!"

"You have called me liar, my Lord King," replied Kenneth firmly; "and therein, at least, you have done me wrong. Know, that there was no blood shed in defence of the Standard save that of a poor hound, which, more faithful than his master, defended the charge which he deserted."

"Now, by Saint George!" said Richard, again heaving up his arm. But De Vaux threw himself between the King and the object of his vengeance, and spoke with the blunt truth of his character, "My liege, this must not be—here, nor by your own hand. It is enough of folly for one night and day, to have entrusted your banner to a Scot—said I not they were ever fair and false?"

"Thou didst, De Vaux; thou wast right, and I confess it," said Richard. "I should have known him better—I should have remembered how the fox William deceived me touching this Crusade."

"My lord," said Sir Kenneth, "William of Scotland never deceived; but circumstances prevented his bringing his forces."

"Peace, shameless!" said the King; "thou sulliest the name of a prince, even by speaking it. And, yet, De Vaux, it is strange," he added, "to see the bearing of the man. Coward or traitor he must be, yet he abode the blow of Richard Plantagenet, as our arm had been raised

to lay knighthood on his shoulder. Had he shown the slightest sign of fear—had but a joint trembled, or an eyelid quivered, I had shattered his head like a crystal goblet. But I cannot strike where there is neither fear nor resistance."

There was a pause.

"My lord," said Kenneth——

"Ha!" replied Richard, interrupting him, "hast thou found thy speech? Ask grace from Heaven, but none from me, for England is dishonoured through thy fault; and wert thou mine own and only brother, there is no pardon for thy fault."

"I speak not to demand grace of mortal man," said the Scot; "it is in your Grace's pleasure to give or refuse me time for Christian shrift—if man denies it, may God grant me the absolution which I would otherwise ask of his Church! But whether I die on the instant, or half an hour hence, I equally beseech your Grace for one moment's opportunity to speak that to your royal person which highly concerns your fame as a Christian King."

"Say on," said the King, making no doubt that he was about to hear some confession concerning the loss of the Banner.

"What I have to speak," said Sir Kenneth, "touches the royalty of England, and must be said to no ears but thine own."

"Begone with yourselves, sirs," said the King to Neville and De Vaux.

The first obeyed, but the latter would not stir from the King's presence. "I leave you not with this false Scot. It is in vain you frown and stamp, my lord," said De Vaux; "I venture not a sick man with a sound one, a naked man with one armed in proof."

"It matters not," said the Scottish knight, "I seek no

excuse to put off time—I will speak in presence of the Lord of Gilsland. He is good lord and true."

"But half an hour since," said De Vaux, with a groan, implying a mixture of sorrow and vexation, "and I had said as much for thee!"

"There is treason around you, King of England," continued Sir Kenneth.

"It may well be as thou say'st," replied Richard, "I have a pregnant example."

"Treason that will injure thee more deeply than the loss of an hundred banners in a pitched field. The—the—" Sir Kenneth hesitated, and at length continued, in a lower tone, "The Lady Edith——"

"Ha!" said the King, drawing himself suddenly into a state of haughty attention, and fixing his eye firmly on the supposed criminal; "What of her?—what of her?—what has she to do with this matter?"

"My lord," said the Scot, "there is a scheme on foot to disgrace your royal lineage, by bestowing the hand of the Lady Edith on the Saracen Soldan, and thereby to purchase a peace most dishonourable to Christendom, by an alliance most shameful to England."

This communication had precisely the contrary effect from that which Sir Kenneth expected.

"Silence," he said, "infamous and audacious! By Heaven, I will have thy tongue torn out with hot pincers, for mentioning the very name of a noble Christian damsel! Know, degenerate traitor, that I was already aware to what height thou had'st dared to raise thine eyes, and endured it, though it were insolence. But now, with lips blistered with the confession of thine own dishonour—that thou should'st *now* dare to name our noble kinswoman as one in whose fate thou hast part or interest! What is it to thee if she marry Saracen or Christian?—what is it to thee, if in a camp where princes turn cowards by day,

and robbers by night—where brave knights turn to partly deserters and traitors—what is it, I say, to thee, or any one, if I should please to ally myself to truth, and to valour, in the person of Saladin ?"

"Little to me, indeed, to whom all the world will soon be as nothing," answered Sir Kenneth, boldly; "but were I now stretched on the rack, I would tell thee, that what I have said is much to thine own conscience and thine own fame. I tell thee, Sir King, that if thou dost but in thought entertain the purpose of wedding thy kinswoman, the Lady Edith——"

"Name her not—and for an instant think not of her," said the King, again straining the curtal-axe in his grip, until the muscles started above his brawny arm.

"Not name—not think of her!" answered Sir Kenneth, his spirits, stunned as they were by self-depression, beginning to recover their elasticity, "Now, by the Cross, on which I place my hope, her name shall be the last word in my mouth, her image the last thought in my mind. Try thy boasted strength on this bare brow, and see if thou can'st prevent my purpose."

"He will drive me mad!" said Richard, who, in his despite, was once more staggered in his purpose by the dauntless determination of the criminal.

XV

DOOM

Just at that moment some bustle was heard without, and the arrival of the Queen was announced from the outer part of the pavilion.

"Detain her—detain her, Neville," said the King; "this is no sight for women—Fie, that I have suffered

such a paltry traitor to chafe me thus !—Away with him, De Vaux," he whispered, " through the back-entrance of our tent. And hark ye—he is presently to die—let him have a ghostly father—we would not kill soul and body. —And stay—hark thee—we will not have him dishonoured —he shall die knight-like, in his belt and spurs."

De Vaux, right glad, if the truth may be guessed, that the scene ended without Richard's descending to the unkingly act of himself slaying an unresisting prisoner, made haste to remove Sir Kenneth, by a private issue, to a separate tent, where he was disarmed and put in fetters for security. De Vaux looked on with a steady and melancholy attention, while the officers, to whom Sir Kenneth was now committed, took these severe precautions. When they were ended, he said solemnly to the unhappy criminal—" It is King Richard's pleasure that you die undegraded—without mutilation of your body, or shame to your arms,—and that your head be severed from the trunk by the sword of the executioner."

" It is kind," said the knight, in a low and rather submissive tone of voice, as one who received an unexpected favour ; " my family will not then hear the worst of the tale—Oh, my father—my father ! "

This muttered invocation did not escape the blunt but kindly-natured Englishman, and he brushed the back of his large hand over his rough features, ere he could proceed.

" It is Richard of England's further pleasure," he said, at length, " that you have speech with a holy man, and I have met on the passage hither with a Carmelite friar, who may fit you for your passage. He waits without, until you are in a habit of mind to receive him."

" Let it be instantly," said the knight. " In this also Richard is kind. I cannot be more fit to see the good father at any time than now ; for life and I have taken

farewell, as two travellers who have arrived at the cross-way, where their roads separate."

"It is well," said De Vaux, slowly and solemnly; "for it irks me somewhat to say that which sums my message. It is King Richard's pleasure that you prepare for instant death."

"God's pleasure and the King's be done," replied the knight, patiently. "I neither contest the justice of the sentence, nor desire delay of the execution."

De Vaux began to leave the tent, but very slowly—paused at the door, and looked back at the Scot—"Can nothing be said or done in thy behalf?"

"Nothing," was the melancholy answer. "I have deserted my charge—the banner intrusted to me is lost. When the headsman and block are prepared, the head and trunk are ready to part company."

"Nay, then, God have mercy!" said De Vaux; "yet would I rather than my best horse I had taken that watch myself. There is mystery in it, young man, as a plain man may descry, though he cannot see through it.—Cowardice? psaw! No coward ever fought as I have seen thee do.—Treachery! I cannot think traitors die in their treason so calmly. Thou hast been trained from thy post by some deep guile—some well-devised stratagem. Come, I pray thee, make a clean conscience of it to me, instead of the priest—Richard is merciful when his mood is abated. Hast thou nothing to intrust to me?"

The unfortunate knight turned his face from the kind warrior, and answered—"NOTHING."

And De Vaux, who had exhausted his topics of persuasion, arose and left the tent, with folded arms, and in melancholy deeper than he thought the occasion merited—even angry with himself, to find that so simple a matter as the death of a Scottish man could affect him so nearly.

"Yet," as he said to himself, "though the rough-footed knaves be our enemies in Cumberland, in Palestine one almost considers them as brethren."

XVI

THE QUEEN'S ERRAND

THE ladies again met after Sir Kenneth had retired from the tent; and the Queen, at first little moved by Edith's angry expostulations, only replied to her by indulging her wit at the expense of the garb, nation, and above all, the poverty, of the Knight of the Leopard, in which she displayed a good deal of playful malice, until Edith was compelled to carry her anxiety to her separate apartment. But when, in the morning, a female, whom Edith had intrusted to make inquiry, brought word that the standard was missing, and its champion vanished, she burst into the Queen's apartment, and implored her to rise and proceed to the King's tent without delay, and use her mediation to prevent the evil consequences of her jest. The Queen, frightened in her turn, cast, as is usual, the blame of her own folly on those around her, and endeavoured to comfort Edith's grief, and appease her displeasure, by a thousand inconsistent arguments.

While Edith in vain strove to intercept this torrent of idle talk, she caught the eye of one of the ladies who entered the Queen's apartment. There was death in her look of affright and horror.

"Madam," Edith said to the Queen, "lose not another word in speaking, but save life—if, indeed," she added, her voice choking as she said it, "life may yet be saved."

"It may—it may," answered the lady Calista. "I have just heard that he has been brought before the King

—it is not yet over—but," she added, bursting into a vehement flood of weeping, "it will soon—unless some course be taken. Up, madam, and let us to King Richard's tent, and beg the poor gentleman's life."

"I will go—I will go instantly," said the Queen, rising and trembling excessively.

The Queen hastily wrapped herself in a large loose mantle, which covered all inaccuracies of the toilet. In this guise, attended by Edith and her women, and preceded and followed by a few officers and men-at-arms, she hastened to the tent of her lion-like husband.

The Monarch was lying on his couch, and at some distance, as awaiting his further commands, stood a man whose profession it was not difficult to conjecture. This truculent official leant on a sword, the blade of which was nearly four feet and a half in length.

Berengaria rushed at once to the side of Richard's couch, dropped on her knees, seized upon the right hand of the King, and gradually pulling it to her with a force which was resisted, though but faintly, she possessed herself of that arm, the prop of Christendom, and the dread of Heathenesse, and imprisoning its strength in both her little fairy hands, she bent upon it her brow.

"What needs this, Berengaria?" said Richard.

"Send away that man—his look kills me!" muttered Berengaria.

"Begone, sirrah," said Richard, still without looking round—"What wait'st thou for? art thou fit to look on these ladies?"

"Your Highness's pleasure touching the head," said the man.

"Out with thee, dog!" answered Richard—"a Christian burial."

The man disappeared.

"And now, foolish wench, what wishest thou?" said

Richard, turning slowly and half reluctantly round to his royal suppliant.

But it was not in nature for any one, far less an admirer of beauty like Richard, to whom it stood only in the second rank to glory, to look without emotion on the countenance of a creature so beautiful as Berengaria, or to feel, without sympathy, that her lips, her brow, were on his hand, and that it was wetted by her tears. By degrees he turned on her his manly countenance, with the softest expression of which his large blue eye, which so often gleamed with insufferable light, was capable.

XVII

APPEALS TO THE KING

"And, once more, what seeks the lady of my heart in her knight's pavilion, at this early and unwonted hour?"

"Pardon, my most gracious liege, pardon," said the Queen, whose fears began again to unfit her for the duty of intercessor.

"Pardon! for what?" said the King.

"First, for entering your royal presence too boldly and unadvisedly——"

She stopped.

"*Thou* too boldly!—the sun might as well ask pardon, because his rays entered the windows of some wretch's dungeon. But I was busied with work unfit for thee to witness, my gentle one, and I was unwilling, besides, that thou should'st risk thy precious health where sickness has been so lately rife."

"Thou wilt not then refuse me one boon—only one—only a poor life?"

"Ha!—proceed," said King Richard, bending his brows.

"This unhappy Scottish knight"—said the Queen.

"Speak not of him, madam," said Richard sternly; "he dies—his doom is fixed."

"Nay, my royal liege and love, 'tis but a silken banner neglected—Berengaria will give thee another, broidered with her own hand, and rich as ever dallied with the wind. Every pearl I have shall go to bedeck it, and with every pearl I will drop a tear of thankfulness to my generous knight."

"Thou know'st not what thou sayest," said the King, interrupting her in anger.—"Pearls! can all the pearls of the East atone for a speck upon England's honour—all the tears that ever woman's eye wept wash away a stain on Richard's fame?—Go to, madam. At present we have duties in which you cannot be our partner."

"Thou hear'st, Edith," whispered the Queen, "we shall but incense him."

"Be it so," said Edith stepping forward.—"My lord—I, your poor kinswoman, crave your justice rather than mercy; and, to the cry of justice the ears of a monarch should be open at every time, place and circumstance."

"Ha! our cousin Edith?" said Richard, rising and sitting upright on the side of his couch—"She speaks ever king-like, and king-like will I answer her, so she bring no request unworthy of herself or me."

The beauty of Edith was of more intellectual cast than that of the Queen; but impatience and anxiety had given her countenance a glow, which it sometimes wanted, and her mien had a character of energetic dignity that imposed silence for a moment even on Richard himself, who, to judge by his looks, would willingly have interrupted her.

"My lord," she said, "this good knight, whose blcod you are about to spill, hath done, in his time, service to

Christendom. He hath fallen from his duty, through a snare set for him in mere folly and idleness of spirit. A message sent to him in the name of one who—why should I not speak it ?—it was in my own—induced him for an instant to leave his post—And what knight in the Christian camp might not have thus far transgressed at the command of a maiden, who, poor howsoever in other qualities, hath yet the blood of Plantagenet in her veins ? "

" And you saw him then, cousin ? " replied the king, biting his lips, to keep down his passion.

" I did, my liege," said Edith. " It is no time to explain wherefore—I am here neither to exculpate myself nor to blame others."

" Can this be Edith Plantagenet ? " said the King, bitterly.—" Edith Plantagenet, the wise and the noble ?—Or is it some love-sick woman ? "

" Oh, peace, peace, for pity's sake," whispered the Queen, " you do but offend him more ! "

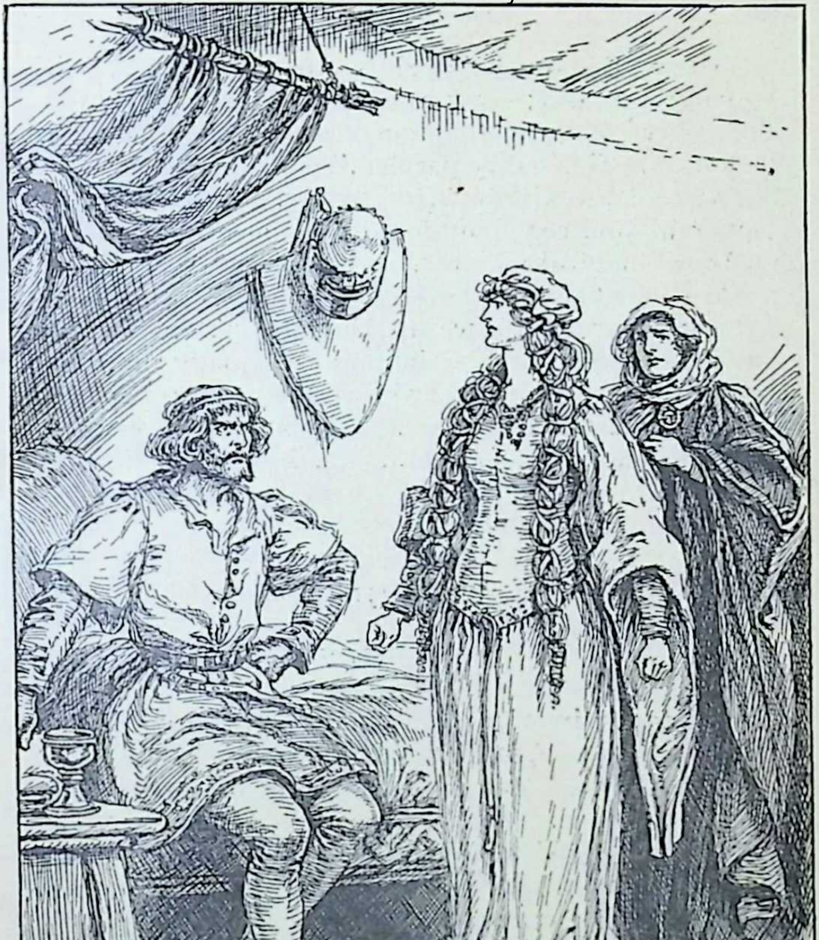
" I care not," said Edith. " Let him work his will on this worthy knight. Edith, for whom he dies, will know how to weep his memory—to me no one shall speak more of politic alliances, to be sanctioned with this poor hand. I could not—I would not—have been his bride living—our degrees were too distant. But death unites the high and the low—I am henceforth the spouse of the grave."

" Away, away," said the King, stamping ; " the sun has risen on the dishonour of England, and it is not yet avenged.—Ladies, withdraw, if ye would not hear orders which would displease you ; for by St. George, I swear—"

" Swear NOT ! " said the voice of one who had just then entered the pavilion.

" Ha ! my learned Hakim," said the King ; " come, I hope, to tax our generosity,"

" I come to request instant speech with you—instant—and touching matters of deep interest."



"MY LORD, I CRAVE YOUR JUSTICE."

" Retire, Berengaria," said the Monarch ; " and, Edith, do you retire also ;—nay, renew not your importunities ! This I give to them, that the execution shall not be till high noon.—Go, and be pacified."

The females withdrew, or rather, hurried from the tent, rank and ceremony forgotten, much like a flock of wild-fowl huddled together, against whom the falcon has made a recent stoop.

They returned thence to the Queen's pavilion, to indulge in regrets and recriminations, equally unavailing. Edith was the only one who seemed to disdain these ordinary channels of sorrow. Without a sigh, without a tear, without a word of upbraiding, she attended upon the Queen.

XVIII

A REPRIEVE

THE King continued, addressing the Arabian,—" In what can I pleasure you, my learned physician ? "

" Great King," said El Hakim, making his profound Oriental obeisance, " let thy servant speak one word, and yet live. I would remind thee that thou owest—not to me, their humble instrument—but to the Intelligences, whose benefits I dispense to mortals, a life——"

"And I warrant me thou wouldst have another in requital, ha ? " interrupted the King.

" Such is my humble prayer," said the Hakim, " to the great Melech Ric—even the life of this good knight, who is doomed to die."

The King began to pace the narrow space of his tent with some emotion, and to talk to himself. " Why—I knew what he desired as soon as ever he entered the

pavilion!—Here is one poor life justly condemned to extinction, and I, a king and a soldier, who have slain thousands by my command, and scores with my own hand, am to have no power over it, although the honour of my arms, of my house, of my very Queen, hath been attainted by the culprit—By Saint George, it makes me laugh!—Wife—Kinswoman—Hakim—each appears in the lists as soon as the other is defeated!—ha! ha! ha!"—And Richard laughed aloud; for he had, in fact, begun to change his mood, his resentment being usually too violent to be of long endurance.

The physician meanwhile looked upon him with a countenance of surprise, not unmingled with contempt; for the Eastern people make no allowance for those mercurial changes in temper, and consider open laughter, upon almost any account, as derogatory to the dignity of man, and becoming only to women and children. At length, the sage addressed the King, when he saw him more composed.

"A doom of death shall not issue from laughing lips.—Let thy servant hope that thou hast granted him this man's life."

"Take the freedom of a thousand captives instead," said Richard; "restore so many of thy countrymen to their tents and families, and I will give the warrant instantly. This man's life can avail thee nothing, and it is forfeited."

"All our lives are forfeited," said the Hakim, putting his hand to his cap. "But the great Creditor is merciful and exacts not the pledge rigorously nor untimely."

"Thou canst show me," said Richard, "no special interest thou hast to become intercessor betwixt me and the execution of justice, to which I am sworn as a crowned king."

"Thou art sworn to the dealing forth mercy as well as

justice," said El Hakim. "Know, then, that the medicine to which thou, Sir King, and many one beside, owe their recovery, is a talisman, composed under certain aspects of the heavens. I am but the poor administrator of its virtues. I dip it in a cup of water, observe the fitting hour to administer it to the patient, and the potency of the draught works the cure."

"A most rare medicine," said the King, "and a commodious."

"Severe restrictions, painful observances, fasts, and penance, are necessary on the part of the sage who uses this mode of cure; and if, through neglect of these preparations he omits to cure at least twelve persons within the course of each moon, the virtue of the divine gift departs from the amulet, and both the last patient and the physician will be exposed to speedy misfortune, neither will they survive the year. I require yet one life to make up the appointed number. Ask, therefore, no further questions; it is enough that, by sparing this man's life at my request, you will deliver yourself, great King, and thy servant, from a great danger."

"Hark thee, Adonbec," replied the King, "I have no objection that leeches should pretend to derive knowledge from the stars; but when you bid Richard Plantagenet fear that a danger will fall upon *him* from some idle omen, or omitted ceremonial, you speak to no ignorant Saxon, or doting old woman, who foregoes her purpose because a hare crosses the path, a raven croaks, or a cat sneezes."

"And is it thus the most renowned Prince repays benefit done to his royal person?" said El Hakim, exchanging the humble and stooping posture, in which he had hitherto solicited the King, for an attitude lofty and commanding. "Know, then," he said, "that through every court of Europe and Asia—to Moslem and Nazarene—to knight and lady—wherever harp is heard and sword

worn—wherever honour is loved and infamy detested—to every quarter of the world will I denounce thee, Melech Ric, as thankless and ungenerous; and even the lands—if there be any such—that never heard of thy renown, shall yet be acquainted with thy shame!"

"Are these terms to me, vile infidel!" said Richard, striding up to him in fury.—"Art weary of thy life?"

"Strike!" said El Hakim; "thine own deed shall then paint thee more worthless than could my words."

Richard turned fiercely from him, folded his arms, traversed the tent as before, and then exclaimed, "Thankless and ungenerous!—as well be termed coward and infidel!—Hakim, thou hast chosen thy boon; and though I had rather thou hadst asked my crown-jewels, yet I may not, king-like, refuse thee. Take this Scot, therefore, to thy keeping—the provost will deliver him to thee on this warrant."

He hastily traced one or two lines, and gave them to the physician. "Use him as thy bond-slave, to be disposed of as thou wilt—only, let him beware how he comes before the eyes of Richard."

"Thy servant understands the word of the King," said the sage, at once resuming the reverent style of address in which he had commenced. "I have heard my lord's pleasure, and to hear is to obey."

"It is well," said the King; "let him consult his own safety, and never appear in my presence more."

"May thy days be multiplied!" answered the Hakim, and withdrew from the apartment after the usual deep obeisance.

King Richard gazed after him as he departed, like one but half-satisfied with what had passed.

"Strange pertinacity," he said, "in this Hakim, and a wonderful chance to interfere between that audacious Scot and the chastisement he has merited so richly Yet, let

him live! there is one brave man the more in the world."

As he spoke, the Archbishop of Tyre craved audience, for the purpose of requesting Richard's attendance, should his health permit, on a secret conclave of the chiefs of the Crusade, and to explain to him the military and political incidents which had occurred during his illness.

[King Richard had sent De Vaux to the Archduke, accusing him of having torn down the banner, and commanding its replacement. But the hermit of Engaddi, who had come to the camp to plead mercy for Sir Kenneth, announced that the Council of the Crusade had decreed its replacement. He rebuked the King for his pride.]

XIX

A PROPOSED MARRIAGE

THE Archbishop of Tyre was an emissary well chosen to communicate to Richard tidings, which from another voice the lion-hearted king would not have brooked to hear, without the most unbounded explosions of resentment.

By the Archbishop's report, it appeared that Saladin was assembling all the forces of his hundred tribes, and that the monarchs of Europe, already disgusted from various motives with the expedition, which had proved so hazardous, and was daily growing more so, had resolved to abandon their purpose.

It needed not any arguments to show Richard the truth of his situation; and, indeed, after his first burst of passion, he sat him calmly down, and with gloomy looks, head depressed, and arms folded on his bosom, listened to the Archbishop's reasoning in the impossibility

of his carrying on the Crusade when deserted by his companions. Nay, he forebore interruptions, even when the prelate ventured, in measured terms, to hint that Richard's own impetuosity had been one main cause of disgusting the princes with the expedition.

"Is it not hard," answered Richard, "that for a burst or two of natural passion, I should be doomed to see fade before me ungathered such a rich harvest of glory to God, and honour to chivalry?—But it shall *not* fade.—By the soul of the Conqueror, I will plant the Cross on the towers of Jerusalem, or it shall be planted over Richard's grave!"

"Thou may'st do it," said the prelate, "yet not another drop of Christian blood be shed in the quarrel. There will be glory enough in having extorted from Saladin, by force of arms, and by the respect inspired by your fame, such conditions, as at once restore the Holy Sepulchre, open the Holy Land to pilgrims, secure their safety by strong fortresses, and, stronger than all, assure the safety of the Holy City, by conferring on Richard the title of King Guardian of Jerusalem."

"How!" said Richard, his eyes sparkling with unusual light,—"I—I—I the King Guardian of the Holy City! Victory itself, but that it *is* victory, could not gain more—scarce so much, when won with unwilling and disunited forces. But Saladin still proposes to retain his interest in the Holy Land?"

"As a joint sovereign, the sworn ally," replied the Prelate, "of the mighty Richard—his relative—if it may be permitted by marriage."

"By marriage!" said Richard, surprised, yet less so than the Prelate had expected. "Ha!—Ay—Edith Plantagenet. Did I dream this?—or did some one tell me? My head is still weak from this fever, and has been agitated. My kinswoman to an infidel—Ha!" exclaimed Richard, as his eyes began to sparkle.

The Prelate hastened to avert his wrath, and spoke with great vehemence and unction on the probability that Saladin would, in case of the proposed alliance, exchange his false faith for the true one.

"Hath the Soldan shown any disposition to become Christian?" said Richard; "if so, the king lives not on earth to whom I would grant the hand of a kinswoman, ay, or sister, sooner than to my noble Saladin."

"Saladin hath heard our Christian teachers," said the Bishop, somewhat evasively,—"my unworthy self—and others—and as he listens with patience, and replies with calmness, it can hardly be but that he be snatched as a brand from the burning."

King Richard listened to the Prelate with a downcast brow and a troubled look.

"I cannot tell," he said, "how it is with me; but methinks these cold counsels of the Princes of Christendom have infected me too with a lethargy of spirit. The time hath been, that, had a layman proposed such alliance to me, I had struck him to earth—if a churchman, I had spit at him as a renegade—yet now this counsel sounds not so strange in mine ear; for why should I not seek for brotherhood and alliance with a Saracen, brave, just, generous,—who loves and honours a worthy foe, as if he were a friend,—while the Princes of Christendom shrink from the side of their allies, and forsake the cause of Heaven and good knighthood?—But I will possess my patience, and will not think of them. Only one attempt will I make to keep this gallant brotherhood together, if it be possible; and if I fail, Lord Archbishop, we will speak together of thy counsel, which, as now, I neither accept nor altogether reject. Wend we to the Council, my lord—the hour calls us. Thou say'st Richard is hasty and proud thou shalt see him humble himself like the lowly broom-plant, from which he derives his surname."

XX

THE COUNCIL OF THE PRINCES

WITHOUT any mark of regal dignity, excepting a ring of gold upon his head, he hastened with the Archbishop of Tyre to attend the Council, which waited but his presence to commence its sitting.

The pavilion of the Council was an ample tent, having before it the large Banner of the Cross displayed. Warders, carefully selected, kept every one at a distance from the neighbourhood of this tent, lest the debates, which were sometimes of a loud and stormy character, should reach other ears than those they were designed for.

Here, therefore, the Princes of the Crusade were assembled, awaiting Richard's arrival; and even the brief delay which was thus interposed, was turned to his disadvantage by his enemies; various instances being circulated of his pride, and undue assumption of superiority.

They had settled, accordingly, that they should receive him on his entrance with slight notice. But when they beheld that noble form, that princely countenance, somewhat pale from his late illness—the eye which had been called by minstrels the bright star of battle and victory—when his feats, almost surpassing human strength and valour, rushed on their recollection, the Council of Princes simultaneously arose—even the jealous King of France, and the sullen and offended Duke of Austria, arose with one consent, and the assembled princes burst forth with one voice in the acclamation, " God save King Richard of England!—Long life to the valiant Lion's Heart! "

With a countenance frank and open as the summer sun when it rises, Richard distributed his thanks around, and

congratulated himself on being once more among his royal brethren of the Crusades.

"Some brief words he desired to say," such was his address to the assembly, "though on a subject so unworthy as himself, even at the risk of delaying for a few minutes their consultations."

The assembled princes resumed their seats, and there was a profound silence.

"This day," continued the King of England, "is a high festival of the Church; and well becomes it Christian men, at such a tide, to reconcile themselves with their brethren, and confess their faults to each other. Noble princes, and fathers of this holy expedition, Richard is a soldier—his hand is ever readier than his tongue—and his tongue is but too much used to the rough language of his trade. But do not, for Plantagenet's hasty speeches and ill-considered actions, forsake the noble cause of the redemption of Palestine—do not throw away earthly renown and eternal salvation, to be won here if ever they can be won by man, because the act of a soldier may have been hasty, and his speech as hard as the iron which he has worn from childhood. Is Richard in default to any of you, Richard will make compensation both by word and action.—I am here a penitent in the confessional.—Do any of you bring a charge, or claim amends from me?"

"I know not on what we could ground any," said the smooth-tongued Conrade, "unless it were that the King of England carries off from his poor brothers of the war all the fame which they might have hoped to gain in the expedition."

"My charge, if I am called to make one," said the Master of the Templars, "is graver and deeper than that of the Marquis of Montserrat. We laud and honour the courage and high achievements of the King of England, but we feel aggrieved that he should, on all occasions, seize

and maintain a precedence and superiority over us, which it becomes not independent princes to submit to. Much we might yield of our free will to his bravery, his zeal, his wealth and his power; but he who snatches all, as matter of right, degrades us from allies into retainers and vassals. Since the royal Richard has asked the truth from us, he must neither be surprised nor angry when he hears such a one as I tell him the truth; which truth, even while I speak it, is, I know, confirmed by the heart of every one who hears me, however respect may stifle their voices."

Richard coloured very highly while the Grand Master was making this direct and unvarnished attack upon his conduct, and the murmur of assent which followed it showed plainly, that almost all who were present acquiesced in the justice of the accusation.

The King then spoke with composure, though not without an embittered tone, especially at the outset.

"And is it even so? I could not have thought that offences, casual and unpremeditated like mine, could find such deep root in the hearts of my allies in this most holy cause; that for my sake they should withdraw their hand from the plough when the furrow was near the end; for my sake turn aside from the direct path to Jerusalem, which their swords have opened. I vainly thought that my small services might have outweighed my rash errors.

"If I have been headstrong in urging bold counsels, I have not, methinks, spared my own blood, or my people's, in carrying them into as bold execution—or if I have, in the hurry of march or battle, assumed a command over the soldiers of others, such have ever been treated as my own, when my wealth purchased the provisions and medicines which their own sovereigns could not procure. But it shames me to remind you of what all but myself seems to have forgotten. Let us rather look forward to our

future measures; and, believe me, brethren," he continued, his face kindling with eagerness, "you shall not find the pride or the wrath, or the ambition of Richard a stumbling-block of offence in the path to which religion and glory summon you. Oh, no, no! never would I survive the thought, that my frailties and infirmities had been the means to sever this goodly fellowship of assembled princes. I would cut off my left hand with my right, could my doing so attest my sincerity. I will yield up, voluntarily, all right to command in the host, even mine own liege subjects. They shall be led by such sovereigns as you may nominate. Or, if ye are yourselves a-weary of this war, leave but with Richard some ten or fifteen thousand of your soldiers to work out the accomplishment of your vow; and when Zion is won," he exclaimed, waving his hand aloft, as if displaying the standard of the Cross over Jerusalem—"when Zion is won, we will write upon her gates, NOT the name of Richard Plantagenet, but of those generous princes who intrusted him with the means of conquest?"

The rough eloquence and determined expression of the military monarch, at once roused the drooping spirits of the Crusaders.

Eye caught fire from eye, voice lent courage to voice. They resumed, as with one accord, the war-cry with which the sermon of Peter the Hermit was echoed back, and shouted aloud, "Lead us on, gallant Lion's heart—so worthy to lead where brave men follow. Lead us on—to Jerusalem—to Jerusalem! It is the will of God—it is the will of God! Blessed is he who will lend an arm to its fulfilment."

The shout, so suddenly and generally raised, was heard beyond the ring of sentinels who guarded the pavilion of Council, and spread among the soldiers of the host, and thousands and tens of thousands answered with the same

shout of "Zion, Zion!—War, war!—instant battle with the infidels! It is the will of God—it is the will of God!"

The acclamations from without increased in their turn the enthusiasm which prevailed within the pavilion. There was no more speech except of a proud advance towards Jerusalem upon the expiry of the truce. The Council broke up, all apparently filled with the same enthusiastic purpose,—which, however, soon faded in the bosom of most, and never had an existence in that of others.

Of the latter class were the Marquis Conrade and the Grand Master of the Templars, who retired together to their quarters ill at ease.

[Conrade and the Grand Master were more embittered than ever against King Richard of England. They forthwith agreed upon a plot whereby Richard's life should be taken by the dagger of an assassin, and the Templar intimated to his companion that he had a man ready to execute the wicked and treacherous design.]

XXI

THE NUBIAN SLAVE

It was the fourth day after Sir Kenneth had been dismissed from the camp. King Richard sat in his pavilion, listening to the busy hum among the soldiery, the clatter from the forges, where horseshoes were preparing, and from the tents of the armourers, who were repairing harness—the voice of the soldiers, too, as they passed and repassed, was loud and cheerful, carrying with its very tone an assurance of high and excited courage, and an omen of approaching victory While Richard's ear

drank in these sounds with delight, and while he yielded himself to the visions of conquest and of glory which they suggested, an equerry told him that a messenger from Saladin waited without.

"Admit him instantly," said the King, "and with due honour, Josceline."

The English knight accordingly introduced a person, apparently of no higher rank than a Nubian slave, whose appearance was nevertheless highly interesting. He was of superb stature and nobly formed, and his commanding features, although almost jet-black, showed nothing of negro descent. He wore over his coal-black locks a milk-white turban, and over his shoulders a short mantle of the same colour, open in front and at the sleeves, under which appeared a doublet of dressed leopard's skin reaching within a handbreadth of the knee. The rest of his muscular limbs, both legs and arms, were bare, excepting that he had sandals on his feet, and wore a collar and bracelets of silver. In his right hand he held a short javelin, with a broad, bright, steel head, of a span in length, and in his left he led, by a leash of twisted silk and gold, a large and noble stag-hound.

The messenger prostrated himself, at the same time partially uncovering his shoulders, in sign of humiliation and having touched the earth with his forehead, arose so far as to rest on one knee, while he delivered to the King a silken napkin, enclosing another of cloth of gold, within which was a letter from Saladin in the original Arabic, with a translation into Norman-English, which may be modernised thus :—

"*Saladin, King of kings, to Melech Ric, the Lion of England. Whereas, we are informed by thy last message, that thou hast chosen war rather than peace, and our enmity rather than our friendship, we account thee as one blinded in this matter, and trust shortly to convince thee of thine*

error, by the help of our invincible forces of the thousand tribes, when Mohammed, the Prophet of God, and Allah, the God of the Prophet, shall judge the controversy betwixt us In what remains, we make noble account of thee, and of the gifts which thou hast sent us. And in requital of these tokens from the treasure-house of thy bounty, behold we have sent thee a Nubian slave, named Zohauk. Know that he is strong to execute the will of his master. We commend him to thy care, hoping the hour may not be distant when he may render thee good service. And herewith we bid thee farewell ; trusting that our most holy Prophet may yet call thee to a sight of the truth, failing which illumination, our desire is, for the speedy restoration of thy royal health, that Allah may judge between thee and us in a plain field of battle."

And the missive was sanctioned by the signature and seal of the Soldan.

Richard surveyed the Nubian in silence as he stood before him, his looks bent upon the ground, his arms folded on his bosom. The King of England, who, as it was emphatically said of his successor Henry VIII, loved to look upon A MAN, was well pleased with the thews, sinews and symmetry of him whom he now surveyed, and questioned him, " Art thou a pagan ? "

The slave shook his head, pointed with his forefinger to Heaven, and then laid it upon his own lips.

" I understand thee," said Richard ; " thou dost suffer under the infliction of God. Canst thou clean armour and belt, and buckle it in time of need ? "

The mute nodded, and stepping towards the coat of mail, which hung, with the shield and helmet of the chivalrous monarch, upon the pillar of the tent, he handled it with such nicety of address, as sufficiently to show that he fully understood the business of the armour-bearer.

" Thou art an apt, and will doubtless be a useful knave

—thou shalt wait in my chamber, and on my person," said the King, "to show how much I value the gift of the royal Soldan. If thou hast no tongue it follows thou canst carry no tales, neither provoke me to be sudden by any unfit reply."

The Nubian again prostrated himself till his brow touched the earth, then stood erect, at some paces distant, as waiting for his new master's commands.

XXII

NEWS FROM HOME

A HORN was winded without, and presently Sir Henry Neville entered with a packet of despatches. "From England, my lord," he said, as he delivered it.

"From England—our own England!" repeated Richard, in a tone of melancholy enthusiasm—"Alas! they little think how hard their Sovereign has been beset by sickness and sorrow—faint friends and forward enemies." Then opening the despatches, he said, hastily, "Ha! this comes from no peaceful land—they too have their feuds. Neville, begone—I must peruse these tidings alone, and at leisure."

Neville withdrew accordingly, and Richard was soon absorbed in the melancholy details which had been conveyed to him from England, concerning the factions that were tearing to pieces his native dominions—the disunion of his brothers John and Geoffrey—the oppressions practised by the nobles upon the peasantry, and the rebellion of the latter against their masters, which had produced everywhere scenes of discord.

Filled with the most painful anxiety, Richard read, and again read, the ill-omened letters, and soon became totally

insensible to whatever was passing around him, although seated, for the sake of coolness, close to the entrance of his tent.

Deeper in the shadow of the pavilion, and busied with the task his new master had imposed, sat the Nubian slave, with his back rather turned towards the King. He was now busily employed on a buckler, of unusual size, causing its surface to shine as bright as crystal. Beyond the Nubian, and scarce visible from without, lay the large dog, which might be termed his brother slave, and which, as if he felt awed by being transferred to a royal owner, was couched close to the side of the mute.

While the monarch and his new attendant were thus occupied, another actor crept upon the scene, and mingled among the group of English yeomen, about a score of whom were keeping a silent guard in front of his tent. It was not, however, more vigilant than usual. Some were playing at games of hazard with small pebbles, others spoke together in whispers of the approaching day of battle, and several lay asleep, their bulky limbs folded in their green mantles.

Amid these careless warders glided the puny form of a little old Turk, poorly dressed like a marabout, a sort of enthusiast, who sometimes ventured into the camp of the Crusaders, though treated always with contumely, and often with violence. When, however, the little insignificant figure we have described approached so nigh as to receive some interruption from the warders, he dashed his dusky turban from his head, and showed that his beard and eyebrows were shaved like those of a professed buffoon. "Dance, marabout," cried the soldiers, acquainted with the manners of these wandering enthusiasts—"dance, or we will scourge thee with our bowstrings, till thou spin as never top did under schoolboy's lash."

The marabout, as if happy to do their behests, bounded

from the earth, and spun his giddy round before them with singular agility. Amid the vagaries of his performance, he flew here and there, from one spot to another, still approaching, however, though almost imperceptibly, to the entrance of the royal tent ; so that, when at length he sunk exhausted on the earth, after two or three bounds still higher than those which he had yet executed, he was not above thirty yards from the king's person.

"Give him water," said one yeoman ; "they always crave a drink after their merry-go-round."

A circle was immediately formed around the prostrate dervise, and while one tall yeoman raised his feeble form from the ground, another presented to him a huge flagon of wine. Incapable of speech, the old man shook his head, and waved away from him with his hand the liquor forbidden by the Prophet ; but his tormentors were not thus to be appeased. The dervise, or whatever he was, drank, or at least seemed to drink, the large flagon to the very bottom at a single pull.

Hastening to a more reverent distance from the royal person, the warders attempted to drag along with them the marabout, who, exhausted, apparently by previous fatigue, or overpowered by the draught he had just swallowed, resisted being moved from the spot, both with struggles and groans.

"Leave him still," whispered Long Allen to his mates, "leave him alone, in less than a minute he will sleep like a dormouse."

At the same moment, the Monarch darted an impatient glance to the ground, and all retreated in haste, leaving the dervise on the ground, unable, as it seemed, to stir a single limb or joint of his body. In a moment afterwards, all was as still and quiet as it had been before the intrusion.

XXIII

THE SLAVE SAVES THE KING'S LIFE

FOR the space of a quarter of an hour or longer, after the incident related, all remained perfectly quiet in the front of the royal habitation. The King read, and mused in the entrance of his pavilion—behind, and with his back turned to the same entrance, the Nubian slave still burnished the ample buckler—in front of all, at a hundred paces distant, the yeomen of the guard stood, sat, or lay extended on the grass, while on the esplanade betwixt them and the front of the tent, lay the senseless form of the marabout.

But the Nubian had the advantage of a mirror, by means of which he beheld, to his alarm and surprise, that the marabout raised his head gently from the ground, so as to survey all around him. He couched his head instantly, as if satisfied he was unobserved, and began, with the slightest possible appearance of voluntary effort, to drag himself, as if by chance, ever nearer and nearer to the King, till he was about ten yards' distance from Richard's person, when, starting on his feet, he sprung forward with the bound of a tiger, stood at the King's back in less than an instant, and brandished aloft the poniard, which he had hidden in his sleeve.

Not the presence of his whole army could have saved their heroic Monarch—but the motions of the Nubian had been as well calculated as those of the enthusiast, and ere the latter could strike, the former caught his uplifted arm. Turning his fanatical wrath upon what thus unexpectedly interposed betwixt him and his object, the seeming marabout, dealt the Nubian a blow with the dagger, which, however, only grazed his arm,

while the far superior strength of the Ethiopian easily dashed him to the ground.

Aware of what had passed, Richard had now arisen, and with little more of surprise, anger, or interest of any kind in his countenance, than an ordinary man would show in brushing off and crushing an intrusive wasp, caught up the stool on which he had been sitting, and exclaiming only "Ha, dog!" dashed almost to pieces the skull of the assassin, who expired at the King's feet.

"Ye are careful warders," said Richard to the archers, in a tone of scornful reproach, as, aroused by the bustle of what had passed, in terror and tumult they now rushed into his tent; "watchful sentinels ye are, to leave me to do such hangman's work with my own hands. For thee, my swart and silent friend," he added, turning to the Ethiopian—"But how's this? thou art wounded—and with a poisoned weapon I warrant me, for by force of stab so weak an animal as that could scarce hope to do more than graze the lion's hide. Suck the poison from his wound, one of you—the venom is harmless on the lips, though fatal when it mingles with the blood."

The yeomen looked on each other confusedly and with hesitation, the apprehension of so strange a danger prevailing with those who feared no other.

"How now, sirrahs," continued the King, "are you dainty-lipped, or do you fear death that you dally thus? Nay, I never bade man do that which I would not do myself."

And, without further ceremony, and in spite of the general expostulations of those around, and the respectful opposition of the Nubian himself, the King of England applied his lips to the wound of the black slave. The Nubian started from him, and, casting a scarf over his arm, intimated by gestures, as firm in purpose as they were respectful in manner, his determination not



THE NUBIAN SLAVE SAVES RICHARD

to permit the monarch to renew so degrading an employment.

Neville, who entered with other officers, added his remonstrances.

" Nay, nay, make not a needless halloo about a hart that the hounds have lost, or a danger when it is over," said the King—" the wound will be a trifle, for the blood is scarce drawn—an angry cat had dealt a deeper scratch. Peace, I prithee—make no more of it. But," he added, " take thee this Nubian to thy quarters, Neville.—I have changed my mind touching him—let him be well cared for. But, hark in thine ear—see that he escapes thee not—there is more in him than seems. Let him have all liberty, so that he leave not the camp. And you, ye beef-devouring English mastiffs, get ye to your guard again, and be sure ye keep it more warily. Think not ye are now in your own land of fair play, where men speak before they strike, and shake hands ere they cut throats."

XXIV

THE SLAVE'S PROPOSAL TO THE KING

The yeomen, abashed and mortified, withdrew to their post, and Neville was beginning to remonstrate with his master upon the risk of passing over thus slightly their negligence upon their duty, when Richard interrupted him with " Speak not of it, Neville—would'st thou have me avenge a petty risk to myself more severely than the loss of England's Banner ? It has been stolen—stolen by a thief, or delivered up by a traitor, and no blood has been shed for it. My sable friend, thou art an expounder of mysteries, saith the illustrious Soldan—now would I give thee thine own weight in gold, if by what means thou wilt,

thou could'st show me the thief who did mine honour that wrong. What say'st thou? ha!"

The youth seemed desirous to speak, but uttered only that imperfect sound proper to his melancholy condition, then folded his arms, looked on the king with an eye of intelligence, and nodded in answer to his question.

"How!" said Richard, with joyful impatience. "Wilt thou undertake to make discovery in this matter?"

The Nubian slave repeated the same motion.

"But how shall we understand each other?" said the King. "Canst thou write, good fellow?"

The slave again nodded in assent.

"Give him writing-tools," said the King. "They were readier in my father's tent than mine—but they be somewhere about, if this scorching climate hath not dried up the ink. Why, this fellow is a jewel—a black diamond, Neville."

The slave, pressing what he had written to his brow, prostrated himself as usual, ere he delivered it into the King's hands. The scroll was in French.

"*To Richard, the conquering and invincible King of England, this from the humblest of his slaves. Were your slave stationed where the leaders of the Christian host were made to pass before him in order, doubt nothing, that if he who did the injury whereof my King complains shall be among the number, he may be made manifest in his iniquity, though it be hidden under seven veils.*"

"Now, by St. George!" said King Richard, "thou hast spoken most opportunely. Neville, thou know'st, that when we muster our troops to-morrow, the princes have agreed that to expiate the affront offered to England in the theft of her Banner, the leaders should pass our new standard as it floats on Saint George's Mount, and salute it with formal regard. Believe me, the secret traitor will not dare to absent himself, lest his very

absence should be matter of suspicion. There we will place our sable man of counsel, and, if his heart can detect the villain, leave me to deal with him."

"My liege," said Neville, with the frankness of an English baron, "beware what work you begin. Here is the concord of our holy league unexpectedly renewed—will you, upon such suspicion as a negro slave can instil, tear open wounds so lately closed. It were scarce too strong to say this were a breach of the declaration your Grace made to the assembled Council of the Crusade."

"Neville," said the King, sternly interrupting him, "thy zeal makes thee presumptuous and unmannerly. Never did I promise to abstain from taking whatever means were most promising, to discover the infamous author of the attack on my honour. Ere I had done so, I would have renounced my kingdom, my life. Mind thou my charge touching this fellow—there is more in him than thy Westmoreland wit can fathom. And thou, swart and silent, prepare to perform the feat thou hast promised, and, by the word of a King, thou shalt choose thine own recompense."

Neville retired from the royal tent, signing to the Nubian to follow him, and much surprised at what he had seen and heard, and especially at the unusual demeanour of the King. In general, no task was so easy as to discover Richard's immediate course of sentiment and feeling. But, on the present occasion, his manner seemed unusually constrained and mysterious, nor was it easy to guess whether displeasure or kindness predominated in his conduct towards his new dependant, or in the looks with which, from time to time, he regarded him.

XXV

SIR KENNETH WITH THE PHYSICIAN

Our narrative retrogrades to a period shortly previous to the incidents last mentioned, when, as the reader must remember, the unfortunate Knight of the Leopard bestowed upon the Arabian physician by King Richard, rather as a slave than in any other capacity, was exiled from the camp of the Crusaders, in whose ranks he had so often and so brilliantly distinguished himself. He followed his new master, for so we must now term the Hakim, to the Moorish tents which contained his retinue and his property, with stupefied feelings.

Arrived at the tent, he threw himself, without speech of any kind, upon a couch of dressed buffalo's hide, which was pointed out to him by his conductor, and hiding his face betwixt his hands, groaned heavily, as if his heart was on the point of bursting.

He was awake long after his Arab host had performed his usual devotions, and betaken himself to his repose, nor had sleep visited him at the hour of midnight, when a movement took place among the domestics, which, though attended with no speech, and very little noise, made him aware they were loading the camels and preparing for departure. In the course of these preparations, the last person who was disturbed, excepting the physician himself, was the Knight of Scotland, whom, about three in the morning, a sort of master of the household acquainted that he must arise. He did so, without further answer, and followed him into the moonlight, where stood the camels, most of which were already loaded, and only one remained kneeling until its burden should be completed.

A little apart from the camels stood a number of horses ready bridled and saddled, and the Hakim himself, coming forth, mounted on one of them, and directed another to be led towards Sir Kenneth. An English officer was in attendance, to escort them through the camp of the Crusaders, and to ensure their leaving it in safety.

At length, the last barriers were left behind them, and the party formed themselves for the march with military precaution. In this manner they proceeded onward, while Sir Kenneth, looking back on the moonlight camp, might now indeed seem banished, from the glimmering banners under which he had hoped to gain additional renown, and the tented dwellings of chivalry, of Christianity, and —of Edith Plantagenet.

The attention of the exile, however, abstracted by his own deep sorrow, was occasionally awakened by the low wail of a dog, secured in a wicker enclosure suspended on one of the camels, which he had no hesitation in recognising to be that of his own faithful hound; and from the plaintive tone of the animal, he had no doubt that he was sensible of his master's vicinity, and in his way, invoking his assistance for liberty and rescue.

" Alas ! poor Roswal," he said, " thou callest for aid and sympathy upon one in stricter bondage than thou thyself art. I will not seem to heed thee, or return thy affection, since it would serve but to load our parting with yet more bitterness."

Thus passed the hours of night, and the space of dim hazy dawn, which forms the twilight of a Syrian morning. Sir Kenneth could now see, at the distance of a mile or more, a dark object moving rapidly on the bosom of the desert, which his experienced eye recognised for a party of cavalry, much superior to their own in numbers, and, from the thick and frequent flashes which flung back the level

beams of the rising sun, it was plain that these were Europeans in their complete panoply.

The anxious looks which the horsemen of El Hakim now cast upon their leader, seemed to indicate deep apprehension ; while he detached two of his best-mounted cavaliers, with instructions to approach as closely as prudence permitted to these travellers of the desert, and observe more minutely their numbers, their character, and, if possible, their purpose. The approach of danger, or what was feared as such, was like a stimulating draught to one in apathy, and recalled Sir Kenneth to himself and his situation.

"What fear you from these Christian horsemen, for such they seem ?" he said to the Hakim.

"Fear !" said El Hakim, repeating the word disdainfully—"The sage fears nothing but Heaven—but ever expects from wicked men the worst which they can do."

"They are Christians," said Sir Kenneth, "and it is the time of truce—why should you fear a breach of faith ?"

"They are the priestly soldiers of the Temple," answered El Hakim, "whose vow limits them to know neither truce nor faith with the worshippers of Islam. Their peace is war, and their faith is falsehood. Other invaders of Palestine have their times and moods of courtesy. The Lion Richard will spare when he has conquered—but this horde of ever-hungry wolves know neither pause not satiety in their rapine.—See'st thou not that they are detaching a party from their main body, and that they take an eastern direction ? Yon are their pages and squires, whom, as lighter mounted, they send to cut us off from our watering-place. But they will be disappointed : *I* know the war of the desert yet better than they."

He spoke a few words to his principal officer, and his whole demeanour and countenance was at once changed

from the solemn repose of an eastern sage, accustomed more to contemplation than to action, into the prompt and proud expression of a gallant soldier.

He threw his arm aloft, and uttered a loud and shrill cry, as a signal to those of his retinue, who instantly dispersed themselves on the face of the desert, in as many different directions as a chaplet of beads when the string is broken. Sir Kenneth had no time to note what ensued; for, at the same instant, the Hakim seized the rein of his steed, and putting his own to its mettle, both sprung forth at once with the suddenness of light, and at a pitch of velocity which almost deprived the Scottish knight of the power of respiration, and left him absolutely incapable, had he been desirous, to have checked the career of his guide.

Practised as Sir Kenneth was in horsemanship from his earliest youth, the speediest horse he had ever mounted was a tortoise in comparison to those of the Arabian sage Miles flew away with minutes, and yet their strength seemed unabated, and their respiration as free as when they first started upon the wonderful race.

It was not until all human pursuit was far, far behind, that the Hakim at length relaxed his speed, and the Scottish knight, looking around him, could now, at the more moderate pace at which they moved, distinguish that he was in a country not unknown to him.

The blighted borders and sullen waters of the Dead Sea, the ragged and precipitous chain of mountains arising on the left, the two or three palms clustered together, forming the single green speck on the bosom of the waste wilderness,—objects which. once seen, were scarcely to be forgotten,—showed to Sir Kenneth that they were approaching the fountain called the Diamond of the Desert which had been the scene of his interview, on a former occasion, with the Saracen Emir Sheerkohf, or Ilderim.

In a few minutes they checked their horses beside the spring, and the Hakim invited Sir Kenneth to descend from horseback and repose himself as in a place of safety. They unbridled their steeds, El Hakim observing that further care of them was unnecessary, since they would be speedily joined by some of the best mounted among his slaves, who would do what further was needful.

"Meantime," he said, spreading some food on the grass, "eat and drink, and be not discouraged. Fortune may raise up or abase the ordinary mortal, but the sage and the soldier should have minds beyond her control."

The Scottish knight endeavoured to testify his thanks by showing himself docile; but the singular contrast between his present situation, and that which he had occupied on the same spot, when the envoy of princes, and the victor in combat, came like a cloud over his mind, and fasting and fatigue oppressed his bodily powers. El Hakim examined his hurried pulse, his red and inflamed eye, his heated hand, and his shortened respiration.

"Thou must sleep," he said, "and that thou may'st do so to refreshment, thou must take a draught mingled with this elixir."

He drew from his bosom a small crystal vial, cased in silver filigree-work, and dropped into a little golden drinking-cup a small portion of a dark-coloured fluid.

"I have seen too much of thy skill, sage Hakim," said Sir Kenneth, "to debate thine hest"; and swallowed the narcotic, mingled as it was with some water from the spring, then wrapped him in the Arab cloak, which had been fastened to his saddle-pommel, and, according to the directions of the physician, stretched himself at ease in the shade to await the promised repose. Sleep came not at first, but in her stead a train of pleasing yet not rousing or awakening sensations.

Gradually these gay visions became obscure, like the

dying hues of sunset, until they were at last lost in total oblivion ; and Sir Kenneth lay extended at the feet of El Hakim, to all appearance, but for his deep respiration, as inanimate a corpse, as if life had actually departed.

XXVI

THE KNIGHT RECOGNISES AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

When the Knight of the Leopard awoke from his long and profound repose, he found himself in circumstances so different from those in which he had laid down to sleep, that he doubted whether he was not still dreaming, or whether the scene had not been changed by magic. Instead of the damp grass, he lay on a couch of more than Oriental luxury, and some kind hands had, during his repose, stripped him of the cassock of chamois which he wore under his armour, and substituted a nightdress of the finest linen, and a loose gown of silk. He had been canopied only by the palm-trees of the desert, but now he lay beneath a silken pavilion, which blazed with the richest colours of the Chinese loom.

He looked around, as if to convince himself that he was actually awake, and all that fell beneath his eye partook of the splendour of his dormitory. He would willingly have resumed his own coarse garments, that he might go forth to see whether the world was as much changed without as within the place of his repose. These, however, were nowhere to be seen, but in their place he found a Saracen dress of rich materials, with sabre and poniard, and all befitting an emir of distinction. He was able to suggest no motive to himself for this exuberance of care, excepting a suspicion that these attentions were intended to shake him in his religious profession

Sir Kenneth, therefore, crossing himself devoutly, resolved to set all such snares at defiance. Aware that his undress was not fit for appearing abroad, he reclined upon the couch, and was again locked in the arms of slumber.

But this time his rest was not unbroken ; for he was awakened by the voice of the physician at the door of the tent, inquiring after his health, and whether he had rested sufficiently.—" May I enter your tent ? " he concluded, " for the curtain is drawn before the entrance."

" The master," replied Sir Kenneth, determined to show that he was not surprised into forgetfulness of his own condition, " need demand no permission to enter the tent of the slave."

" But if I come not as a master ? " said El Hakim, still without entering.

" The physician," answered the knight, " hath free access to the bedside of his patient."

" Neither come I now as a physician," replied El Hakim, " and therefore I still request permission, ere I come under the covering of thy tent."

" Whoever comes as a friend," said Sir Kenneth, " and such thou hast hitherto shown thyself to me, the habitation of the friend is ever open to him."

" Yet once again," said the Eastern sage, " supposing that I come not as a friend."

" Come as thou wilt," said the Scottish knight, somewhat impatient of this circumlocution,—" be what thou wilt—thou knowest well it is neither in my power nor my inclination to refuse thee entrance."

" I come, then," said El Hakim, " as your ancient foe ; but a fair and a generous one."

He entered as he spoke ; and when he stood before the bedside of Sir Kenneth, the voice continued to be that of Adonbec the Arabian physician, but the form, dress, and

features were those of Ilderim of Kurdistan, called Sheerkohf. Sir Kenneth gazed upon him, as if he expected the vision to depart, like something created by his imagination.

"Doth it so surprise thee," said Ilderim, "and thou an approved warrior, to see that a soldier knows something of the art of healing?"

As he spoke the Christian knight repeatedly shut his eyes, and while they remained closed, the idea of the Hakim, with his long flowing dark robes, high Tartar cap, and grave gestures was present to his imagination; but as soon as he opened them, the gracefully and richly-gemmed turban, the light coat of mail of steel rings entwisted with silver, announced the soldier and not the sage.

"Art thou still so much surprised," said the Emir "and hast thou walked in the world with such little observance, as to wonder that men are not always what they seem?—Thou thyself—art thou what thou seemest?"

"No, by Saint Andrew!" exclaimed the Knight; "for to the whole Christian camp I seem a traitor, and I know myself to be a true, though an erring man."

"Even so I judged thee," said Ilderim, "and as we had eaten salt together, I deemed myself bound to rescue thee from death and contumely. But Saladin desires no converts saving those whom the holy Prophet shall dispose to submit themselves to his law? Wherefore wear, without doubt or scruple, the vesture prepared for you, since if you proceed to the camp of Saladin, your own native dress will expose you to troublesome observation, and perhaps to insult."

"*If* I go to the camp of Saladin?" said Sir Kenneth, repeating the words of the Emir. "Alas! am I a free agent, and rather must I *not* go wherever your pleasure carries me!"

"Thine own will may guide thine own motions," said the Emir, "as freely as the wind which moveth the dust of the desert in what direction it chooseth. The noble enemy who met, and well-nigh mastered my sword, cannot become my slave like him who has crouched beneath it."

XXVII

OF SALADIN, EDITH, AND THE KNIGHT

"Noble Emir," said Sir Kenneth, "permit me to express, as bound in courtesy, my gratitude for this most chivalrous bounty, this undeserved generosity."

"Say not undeserved," replied the Emir Ilderim; "was it not through thy conversation, and thy account of the beauties which grace the court of the Melech Ric, that I ventured me thither in disguise, and thereby procured a sight the most blessed that I have ever enjoyed—that I ever shall enjoy, until the glories of Paradise beam on my eyes?"

"I understand you not," said Sir Kenneth, colouring alternately, and turning pale, as one who felt that the conversation was taking a tone of the most painful delicacy.

"Not understand me!" exclaimed the Emir. "If the sight I saw in the tent of King Richard escaped thine observation, I will account it duller than the edge of a buffoon's wooden falchion. True, thou wert under sentence of death at the time; but, in my case, had my head been dropping from the trunk, the last strained glances of my eyeballs had distinguished with delight such a vision of loveliness. Yonder royalty of England, who for her superior loveliness deserves to be Queen of the universe—what tenderness in her blue eye!—what lustre in her tresses of dishevelled gold!"

"Saracen," said Sir Kenneth sternly, "thou speakest of the wife of Richard of England, of whom men think not and speak not as a woman to be won, but as a Queen to be revered."

"I cry you mercy," said the Saracen. "I had forgotten your superstitious veneration for the sex. I warrant, since thou exactest such profound respect to yonder tender piece of frailty, whose every motion, step and look bespeaks her very woman, less than absolute adoration must not be yielded to her of the dark tresses, and nobly-speaking eye. *She*, indeed, I will allow, hath in her noble port and majestic mien something at once pure and firm.—Thou lovest this kinswoman of the Melech Ric. Unfold the veil that shrouds thy thoughts—or unfold it not if thou wilt, for mine eyes see through its coverings."

"I *loved* her," answered Sir Kenneth, after a pause, "as a man loves Heaven's grace, and sued for her favour like a sinner for Heaven's pardon."

"And you love her no longer?" said the Saracen.

"Alas!" answered Sir Kenneth, "I am no longer worthy to love her.—I prithee cease this discourse—thy words are poniards to me."

"Pardon me but for a moment," continued Ilderim. "When thou, a poor and obscure soldier, did'st so boldly and so highly fix thine affection, tell me, had'st thou good hope of its issue."

"Love exists not without hope," replied the knight; "but mine was as nearly allied to despair, as that of the sailor swimming for his life, who, as he surmounts billow after billow, catches by interval some gleam of the distant beacon, which shows him there is land in sight, though his sinking heart and wearied limbs assure him that he shall never reach it."

"And now," said Ilderim, "these hopes are sunk—that solitary light is quenched for ever?"

" For ever," answered Sir Kenneth, in the tone of an echo from the bosom of a ruined sepulchre.

" Methinks," said the Saracen, " if all thou lackest were some such distant glimpse of happiness as thou had'st formerly, thy beacon-light might be rekindled, thy hope fished up from the ocean in which it has sunk. In a word if it will content thee to be placed in such reputation as may be attained by detection of the thief who stole the Banner of England, I can put thee in a fair way of achieving this task—that is, if thou wilt be governed."

" Thou art wise, Ilderim," said the Scot, " wise though a Saracen, and generous though an infidel. I have witnessed that thou art both. Take, then, the guidance of this matter ; and so thou ask nothing of me contrary to my loyalty and my Christian faith, I will obey thee punctually. Do what thou hast said, and take my life when it is accomplished."

" Listen thou to me, then," said the Saracen. " Thy noble hound is now recovered, by the blessing of that divine medicine which healeth man and beast, and by his sagacity shall those who assailed him be discovered."

" Ha ! " said the knight,—" methinks I comprehend thee—I was dull not to think of this ! "

" But tell me," added the Emir, " hast thou any followers or retainers in the camp, by whom the animal may be known ? "

" I dismissed," said Sir Kenneth, " my old attendant, thy patient, with a varlet that waited on him, at the time when I expected to suffer death, giving him letters for my friends in Scotland—there are none other to whom the dog is familiar. But then my own person is well known—my very speech will betray me, in a camp where I have played no mean part for many months."

" Both he and thou shall be disguised, so as to escape even close examination.—I tell thee," said the Saracen,

"that not thy brother in arms—not thy brother in blood—shall discover thee, if thou be guided by my counsels. But mark me—there is still the condition annexed to this service, that thou deliver a letter of Saladin to the niece of the Melech Ric."

Sir Kenneth paused before he answered, and the Saracen, observing his hesitation, demanded of him "if he feared to undertake this message?"

"Not if there were death in the execution," said Sir Kenneth; "I do but pause to consider whether it consists with my honour to bear the letter of the Soldan, or with that of the Lady Edith to receive it from a heathen prince."

"By the honour of a soldier," said the Emir, "I swear to thee that the letter is written in all honour and respect."

"Then," said the knight, "I will bear the Soldan's letter faithfully—understanding, that beyond this simple act of service, from me of all men he can least expect mediation or advice in this his strange love-suit."

"Saladin is noble," answered the Emir, "and will not spur a generous horse to a leap which he cannot achieve.—Come with me to my tent," he added, "and thou shalt be presently equipped with a disguise as unsearchable as midnight."

XXVIII

THE TRAITOR DETECTED

THE reader can now have little doubt who the Ethiopian slave really was, with what purpose he had sought Richard's camp, and with what hope he now stood close to the person of that monarch, as, surrounded by his valiant peers of England and Normandy, Cœur de Lion

stood on the summit of St. George's Mount, with the Banner of England by his side, borne by the most goodly person in the army, being his own natural brother, William with the Long Sword, Earl of Salisbury.

From several expressions in the King's conversation with Neville on the preceding day, the Nubian was left in anxious doubt whether his disguise had not been penetrated. Nevertheless, as the King continued to treat him in no other manner than his exterior required, the Nubian determined not to throw his disguise aside voluntarily.

Meanwhile, the powers of the various Crusading princes, arrayed under their royal and princely leaders, swept in long order around the base of the little mound; and as those of each different country passed by, their commanders advanced a step or two up the hill, and made a sign of courtesy to Richard and to the Standard of England.

On they passed, troop after troop, banners waving, spears glancing, plumes dancing, in long perspective—a host composed of different nations, complexions, languages, arms, and appearances, but all fired, for the time, with the holy yet romantic purpose of rescuing the distressed daughter of Zion from her thraldom, and redeeming the sacred earth, which more than mortal had trodden, from the yoke of the unbelieving Pagan.

The good King was seated on horseback about half way up the Mount, his manly features exposed to public view, as, with cool and considerate eye, he perused each rank as it passed him, and returned the salutation of the leaders. By his side stood the seeming Ethiopian slave, holding the noble dog in a leash, such as was used in wood-craft. It was a circumstance which attracted no notice, for many of the princes of the Crusade had introduced black slaves into their household, in imitation of the barbarous splendour of the Saracens

Over the King's head streamed the large folds of the Banner, and as he looked to it from time to time, he seemed to regard a ceremony, indifferent to himself personally, as important, when considered as atoning an indignity offered to the kingdom which he ruled.

Ever and anon his eyes were turned on the Nubian and the dog, but only when such leaders approached, as from circumstances of previous ill-will, he suspected of being accessory to the theft of the standard, or whom he judged capable of a crime so mean.

Thus he did not look in that direction when Philip Augustus of France approached at the head of his splendid troops of Gallic chivalry—nay, he anticipated the motions of the French King, by descending the Mount as the latter came up the ascent, so that they met in the middle space, and blended their greetings so gracefully, that it appeared they met in fraternal equality.

The sight of the two greatest princes in Europe thus publicly avowing their concord, called forth bursts of thundering acclaim from the Crusading host at many miles' distance. Yet who but the King of kings can read the hearts of monarchs? Under this smooth show of courtesy, Richard nourished displeasure and suspicion against Philip, and Philip meditated withdrawing himself and his host from the Army of the Cross, and leaving Richard to accomplish or fail in the enterprise with his own unassisted forces.

Richard's demeanour was different when the dark-armed knights and squires of the Temple chivalry approached. The King cast a hasty glance aside, but the Nubian stood quiet, and his trusty dog sat at his feet, watching, with a sagacious yet pleased look, the ranks which now passed before them.

"Lo you, here comes our valiant adversary, the Duke of Austria—mark his manner and bearing, Long Sword—and

thou, Nubian, let the hound have full view of him. By Heaven, he brings his buffoons along with him ! "

King Richard looked more than once at the Nubian and his dog ; but the former moved not, nor did the latter strain at the leash, so that Richard said to the slave with some scorn, " Thy success in this enterprise, my sable friend, even though thou hast brought thy hound's sagacity to back thine own, will not, I fear, place thee high in the rank of wizards."

The Nubian answered, as usual, only by a lowly obeisance.

Meanwhile the troops of the Marquis of Montserrat next passed in order before the King of England.

Before this goodly band came Conrade. The noble steed which he reined bounded and displayed his spirit and agility in a manner which might have troubled a less admirable horseman than the Marquis, who gracefully ruled him with one hand.

Conrade, who, by cultivating Richard's humour, had attained a certain degree of favour with him, no sooner was come within his ken than the King of England descended a step or two to meet him, when Roswal, the noble hound, uttering a furious and savage yell, sprung forward. The Nubian, at the same time, slipped the leash, and the hound, rushing on, leaped upon Conrade's noble charger, and, seizing the Marquis by the throat, pulled him down from the saddle. The plumed rider lay rolling on the sand, and the frightened horse fled in wild career through the camp.

" Thy hound hath pulled down the right quarry, I warrant him," said the King to the Nubian. " Pluck the dog off, lest he throttle him."

The Ethiopian, accordingly, though not without difficulty, disengaged the dog from Conrade, and fastened him up, still highly excited, and struggling in the leash.

Meanwhile many crowded to the spot, especially followers of Conrade, who, as they saw their leader lie gazing wildly on the sky, raised him up amid a tumultuous cry of—" Cut the slave and his hound to pieces ! "

But the voice of Richard, loud and sonorous, was heard clear above all other exclamations—" He dies the death who injures the hound ! He hath but done his duty, after the sagacity with which God and nature have endowed the brave animal.—Stand forward for a false traitor, thou Conrade, Marquis of Montserrat ! I impeach thee of treason."

Several of the Syrian leaders had now come up, and Conrade, vexation and shame and confusion struggling with passion in his manner and voice, exclaimed, " What means this ?—With what am I charged ?—Why this base usage and these reproachful terms ?—Is this the league of concord which England renewed but so lately ? "

" Are the Princes of the Crusades turned hares or deers in the eyes of King Richard, that he should slip hounds on them ? " said the sepulchral voice of the Grand Master of the Templars.

" It must be some singular accident—some fatal mistake," said Philip of France, who rode up at the same moment.

" Some deceit of the enemy," said the Archbishop of Tyre.

" A stratagem of the Saracens," cried Henry of Champagne—" It were well to hang up the dog, and put the slave to the torture."

" Let no man lay hand upon them," said Richard, " as he loves his own life !—Conrade, stand forth, if thou darest and deny the accusation which this mute animal hath in his noble instinct brought against thee of injury done to him, and foul scorn to England ? "

" I never touched the Banner," said Conrade, hastily.

"Thy words betray thee, Conrade!" said Richard "for how did'st thou know, save from conscious guilt, that the question is concerning the Banner?"

By this time the alarm was becoming general, so that Philip of France interposed.

"Princes and nobles," he said, "you speak in presence of those whose swords will soon be at the throats of each other, if they hear their leaders at such terms together. In the name of Heaven, let us draw off, each his own troops, into their separate quarters, and ourselves meet an hour hence in the Pavilion of Council, to take some order in this new state of confusion."

"Content," said King Richard, "though I should have liked to have interrogated that caitiff while his gay doublet was yet besmirched with sand—But the pleasure of France shall be ours in this matter."

The leaders separated as was proposed, each prince placing himself at the head of his own forces; and then was heard on all sides the crying of war-cries, and the sounding of gathering notes upon bugles and trumpets, by which the different stragglers were summoned to their prince's banner; and the troops were shortly seen in motion, each taking different routes, through the camp to their own quarters.

XXIX

A CHALLENGE TO THE COMBAT

THE Council assembled at the appointed hour. Conrade had in the meanwhile laid aside his dishonoured dress, and with it the shame and confusion which, in spite of his talents and promptitude, had at first overwhelmed him owing to the strangeness of the accident, and suddenness of

the accusation. He was now robed like a prince, and entered the council-chamber attended by the Archduke of Austria, the Grand Masters both of the Temple and of the Order of St. John, and several other potentates, who made a show of supporting him and defending his cause.

This appearance of union in favour of Conrade was far from influencing the King of England.

He entered the Council with his usual indifference of manner and in the same dress in which he had just alighted from horseback. He cast a careless and somewhat scornful glance on the leaders, who had with studied affectation arranged themselves around Conrade, as if owning his cause, and in the most direct terms charged Conrade of Montserrat with having stolen the Banner of England, and wounded the faithful animal who stood in its defence.

Conrade arose boldly to answer, and in despite, as he expressed himself, of man and brute, king or dog, avouched his innocence of the crime charged.

"Brother of England," said Philip, who willingly assumed the character of moderator of the Assembly, "this is an unusual impeachment. We do not hear you avouch your own knowledge of this matter, further than your belief resting upon the demeanour of this hound towards the Marquis of Montserrat. Surely the word of a knight and a prince should bear him out against the barking of a cur?"

"Royal brother," returned Richard, "recollect that the Almighty, who gave the dog to be the companion of our pleasures and our toils, hath invested him with a nature noble and incapable of deceit. He forgets neither friend nor foe—remembers, and with accuracy, both benefit and injury. He hath a share of man's intelligence, but no share of man's falsehood. You may bribe a soldier to slay a man with his sword, or a witness to take life by

false accusation; but you cannot make a hound tear his benefactor—he is the friend of man, save when man justly incurs his enmity. Dress yonder Marquis in what peacock-robes you like—disguise his appearance—alter his complexion with drugs and washes—hide him amidst an hundred men—I will yet pawn my sceptre that the hound detects him, and expresses his resentment, as you have this day beheld. But there lies our own glove—we appeal him to the combat in respect of the evidence we brought forth against him—a king, at least, is more than the mate of a marquis."

Conrade made no hasty effort to seize on the pledge which Richard cast into the middle of the assembly, and King Philip had time to reply, ere the Marquis made a motion to lift the glove.

"A king," said he of France, "is as much more than a match for the Marquis of Conrade, as a dog would be less. Royal Richard, this cannot be permitted. You are the leader of our expedition—the sword and buckler of Christendom."

"I," said William with the Long Sword, Earl of Salisbury, "protest against my royal brother perilling his life, which is the property of the people of England, in such a cause.—Here, noble brother, receive back your glove and and think only as if the wind had blown it from your hand. Mine shall lie in its stead. A king's son is at least a match for this Marquis."

"Princes and nobles," said Conrade, "I will not accept of King Richard's defiance. He hath been chosen our leader against the Saracens, and if *his* conscience can answer the accusation of provoking an ally to the field on a quarrel so frivolous, *mine*, at least, cannot endure the reproach of accepting it. But touching his brother, William of Woodstock, or against any other who shall adopt, or shall dare to stand godfather to this most false

charge, I will defend my honour in the lists, and prove whosoever impeaches it a false liar."

"The Marquis of Montserrat," said the Archbishop of Tyre, "hath spoken like a wise and moderate gentleman; and methinks this controversy might, without dishonour to any party, end at this point."

"Methinks it might so terminate," said the King of France, "provided King Richard will recall his accusation, as made upon over slight grounds."

"Philip of France," answered Cœur de Lion, "my words shall never do my thoughts so much injury. I have charged yonder Conrade as a thief, who, under cloud of night, stole from its place the emblem of England's dignity. I still believe and charge him to be such; and when a day is appointed for the combat, doubt not that, since Conrade declines to meet us in person, I will find a champion to appear in support of my challenge, for thou, William, must not thrust thy long sword into this quarrel without our special licence."

"Since my rank makes me arbiter in this most unhappy matter," said Philip of France, "I appoint the fifth day hence for the decision thereof, by way of combat, according to knightly usage—Richard, King of England, to appear by his champion as appellant, and Conrade, Marquis of Montserrat, in his own person, as defendant. Yet I own, I know not where to find neutral ground where such a quarrel may be fought out; for it must not be in the neighbourhood of this camp, where the soldiers would make faction on the different sides."

"It were well, said Richard, "to apply to the generosity of the royal Saladin, since heathen as he is, I have never known knight more fulfilled of nobleness, or to whose good faith we may so peremptorily intrust ourselves. I speak thus for those who may be doubtful of mishap—for myself, wherever I see my foe, I make that spot my battle-ground."

"Be it so," said Philip, "we will make this matter known to Saladin, although it be showing to an enemy the unhappy spirit of discord which we would willingly hide from even ourselves, were it possible. Meanwhile, I dismiss this assembly, and charge you all, as Christian men and noble knights, that ye let this unhappy feud breed no further brawling in the camp, but regard it as a thing solemnly referred to the judgment of God, to whom each of you should pray that He will dispose of victory in the combat according to the truth of the quarrel; and therewith may His will be done!"

"Amen, amen!" was answered on all sides.

[Richard, who had penetrated Sir Kenneth's disguise, sent him to the camp of Saladin, with a hint that in that camp might be found a champion to do battle with the marquis. An audience with Edith was allowed, but the King, addressing Sir Kenneth as a supposed mute, yet in such a way as to show that he knew him and expected knightly faith, warned him that he must be silent with her. Edith also had guessed his disguise, and could not understand why he should not speak to her She dismissed him in anger.]

XXX

PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMBAT

On the subsequent morning, Richard was invited to a conference by Philip of France, in which the latter, with many expressions of his high esteem for his brother of England, communicated to him his positive intention to return to Europe, and to the cares of his kingdom. Richard remonstrated, but in vain; and when the conference ended, he received without surprise a manifesto

from the Duke of Austria, and several other princes, announcing a resolution similar to that of Philip, and, in no modified terms, assigning for their defection from the cause of the Cross, the inordinate ambition and arbitrary domination of Richard of England.

All hopes of continuing the war with any prospect of ultimate success were now abandoned, and Richard shed bitter tears over his disappointed hopes of glory.

"They had not dared to have deserted my father thus," he said to De Vaux, in the bitterness of his resentment.—"No slanders they could have uttered against so wise a king would have been believed in Christendom; whereas —fool that I am!—I have not only afforded them a pretext for deserting me, but even a colour for casting all the blame of the rupture upon my unhappy foibles."

These thoughts were so deeply galling to the King, that De Vaux was rejoiced when the arrival of an ambassador from Saladin turned his reflections into a different channel.

Animated by the cheerful acquiescence with which the envoy of Saladin afforded a fair field for the combat, and offered his own person as a guarantee of his fidelity, Richard soon forgot his disappointed hopes, and the approaching dissolution of the Christian league, in the interesting discussions preceding a combat in the lists.

The station, called the Diamond of the Desert, was assigned for the place of the conflict, as being nearly at an equal distance betwixt the Christian and Saracen camps.

It was agreed that Conrade of Montserrat, the defendant, with his godfathers, the Archduke of Austria and the Grand Master of the Templars, should appear there on the day fixed for the combat, with a hundred armed followers, and no more; that Richard of England, and his brother Salisbury, who supported the accusation, should attend with the same number, to protect his champion; and that the Soldan should bring with him a guard of five hundred

chosen followers, a band considered as not more than equal to the two hundred Christian lances. Such persons of consideration as either party chose to invite to witness the contest, were to wear no other weapons than their swords, and to come without defensive armour.

The Soldan undertook the preparations of the lists, and to provide accommodations and refreshments of every kind for all who were to assist at the solemnity; and his letters expressed, with much courtesy, the pleasure which he anticipated in the prospect of a personal and peaceful meeting with the Melech Ric, and his anxious desire to render his reception as agreeable as possible.

On the day before that appointed for the combat, Conrade and his friends set off by daybreak to repair to the place assigned, and Richard left the camp at the same hour, and for the same purpose; but, as had been agreed upon, he took up his journey by a different route.

XXXI

MEETING OF KING RICHARD AND SALADIN

THE Diamond of the Desert, so lately a solitary fountain, distinguished only amid the waste by solitary groups of palm-trees, was now the centre of an encampment, the embroidered flags and gilded ornaments of which glittered far and wide, and reflected a thousand rich tints against the setting sun. The coverings of the large pavilions were of the gayest colours, scarlet, bright yellow, pale blue, and other gaudy and gleaming hues, and the tops of their pillars, or tent-poles, were decorated with golden pomegranates and small silken flags.

But, besides these distinguished pavilions, there were what Thomas de Vaux considered as a portentous number

of the ordinary black tents of the Arabs, being sufficient, as he conceived, to accommodate, according to the Eastern fashion, a host of five thousand men.

A number of Arabs soon formed a deep and confused mass of dismounted cavalry in front of their encampment, when, at the signal of a shrill cry, which arose high over the clangour of the music, each cavalier sprung to his saddle. A cloud of dust arising at the moment of this manœuvre, hid from Richard and his attendants the camp, the palm-trees and the distant ridge of mountains, as well as the troops whose sudden movement had raised the cloud.

Another shrill yell was heard. It was the signal for the cavalry to advance, which they did at full gallop, disposing themselves as they came forward, so as to come in at once on the front flanks, and rear, of Richard's little body-guard, who were thus surrounded and almost choked by the dense clouds of dust, through which were seen alternately, and lost, the grim forms and wild faces of the Saracens, brandishing and tossing their lances in every possible direction, with the wildest cries and halloos, and frequently only reining up their horses when within a spear's length of the Christians, while those in the rear discharged over the heads of both parties thick volleys of arrows. One of these struck the litter in which the Queen was seated, who loudly screamed, and the red spot was on Richard's brow in an instant.

"Ha! Saint George!" he exclaimed, "we must take some order with this infidel scum!"

But Edith, whose litter was near, thrust her head out, and with her hand holding one of the shafts, exclaimed, "Royal Richard, beware what you do! see, these arrows are headless!"

"Noble, sensible woman!" exclaimed Richard; "by Heaven, thou shamest us all by thy readiness of thought

and eye.—Be not moved, my English hearts," he exclaimed to his followers—" their arrows have no heads—and their spears, too, lack the steel points. It is but a wild welcome, after their savage fashion, though doubtless they would rejoice to see us daunted or disturbed. Move onward, slow and steady."

The little phalanx moved forward accordingly, accompanied on all sides by the Arabs, with the shrillest and most piercing cries.

As they had advanced nearly halfway towards the camp another shrill cry was heard, on which all these irregulars, who were on the front and upon the flanks of the little body of Europeans, wheeled off, and forming themselves into a long and deep column, followed with comparative order and silence in the rear of Richard's troop.

The dust began now to dissipate in their front, when there advanced to meet them, through that cloudy veil, a body of cavalry of a different and more regular description, completely armed with offensive and defensive weapons, and who might well have served as a body-guard to the proudest of Eastern monarchs. This splendid troop consisted of five hundred men, and each horse which it contained was worth an earl's ransom. The riders were Georgian and Circassian slaves in the very prime of life.

This splendid array advanced to the sound of military music, and when they met the Christian body, they opened their files to the right and left, and let them enter between their ranks. Richard now asssumed the foremost place in his troop, aware that Saladin himself was approaching.

Nor was it long when, in the centre of his body-guard, surrounded by his domestic officers, came the Soldan, with the look and manners of one on whose brow Nature had written, This is the King.

In his snow-white turban, vest, and wide Eastern trousers, wearing a sash of scarlet silk, without any other

ornament, Saladin might have seemed the plainest dressed man in his own guard. But closer inspection discerned in his turban that inestimable gem, which was called by the poets, the Sea of Light; whilst the diamond on which his signet was engraved, and which he wore in a ring, was probably worth all the jewels of the English crown. He rode a milk-white Arabian, which bore him as if conscious and proud of his noble burden.

There was no need of further introduction. The two heroic monarchs, for such they both were, threw themselves at once from horseback, and the troops halting and the music suddenly ceasing, they advanced to meet each other in profound silence, and after a courteous inclination on either side, they embraced as brethren and equals.

XXXII

IN SALADIN RICHARD DISCOVERS THE PHYSICIAN

THE pomp and display upon both sides attracted no further notice—no one saw aught save Richard and Saladin, and they too beheld nothing but each other. The looks with which Richard surveyed Saladin were, however, more intently curious than those which the Soldan fixed upon him; and the Soldan also was the first to break silence.

"The Melech Ric is welcome to Saladin as water to this desert. I trust he hath no distrust of this numerous array. Excepting the armed slaves of my household, those who surround you with eyes of wonder and of welcome, are, even the humblest of them, the privileged nobles of my thousand tribes; for who that could claim

a title to be present, would remain at home when such a Prince was to be seen as Richard, with the terrors of whose name the nurse stills her child, and the free Arab subdues his restive steed ? "

" And these are all nobles of Araby ? " said Richard, looking around.

" They claim such rank," said Saladin ; " but though numerous, they are within the conditions of the treaty, and bear no arms but the sabre—even the iron of their lances is left behind."

" I fear," muttered De Vaux in English, "they have left them where they can soon be found."

" Hush, De Vaux," said Richard, " I command thee.—Noble Saladin," he said, " suspicion and thou cannot exist on the same ground.—See'st thou," pointing to the litters —" I too have brought some champions with me, though armed, perhaps, in breach of agreement, for bright eyes and fair features are weapons which cannot be left behind."

The Soldan, turning to the litters, made an obeisance, and kissed the sand in token of respect.

" Nay," said Richard,—" they will not fear a closer encounter, brother ; wilt thou not ride towards their litters, and the curtains will be presently withdrawn."

" That may Allah prohibit ! " said Saladin, " since not an Arab looks on who would not think it shame to the noble ladies to be seen with their faces uncovered."

" Thou shalt see them, then, in private, brother," answered Richard.

" To what purpose," answered Saladin mournfully. " Thy last letter was to the hopes which I had entertained, like water to fire ; and wherefore should I again light a flame, which may indeed consume, but cannot cheer me ? —But will not my brother pass to the tent which his servant hath prepared for him ? My principal black slave

hath taken order for the reception of the Princesses—the officers of my household will attend your followers, and ourself will be the chamberlain of the royal Richard."

He led the way accordingly to a splendid pavilion, where was everything that royal luxury could devise. De Vaux, who was in attendance, then removed the long riding-cloak which Richard wore, and he stood before Saladin in the close dress which showed to advantage the strength and symmetry of his person, while it bore a strong contrast to the flowing robes which disguised the thin frame of the Eastern monarch. It was Richard's two-handed sword that chiefly attracted the attention of the Saracen, a broad straight blade, the seemingly unwieldy length of which extended well-nigh from the shoulder to the heel of the wearer.

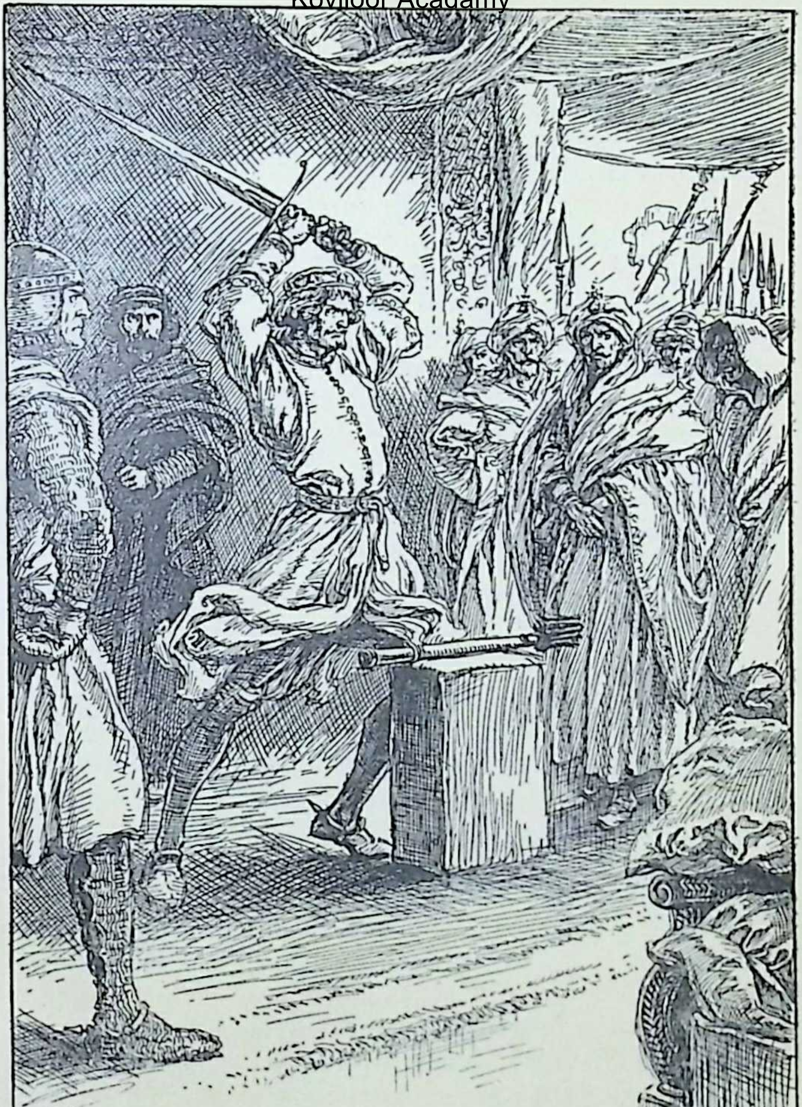
"Had I not," said Saladin, "seen this brand flaming in the front of battle, I had scarce believed that human arm could wield it. Might I request to see the Melech Ric strike one blow with it in peace, and in pure trial of strength?"

"Willingly, noble Saladin," answered Richard; and looking around for something whereon to exercise his strength, he saw a steel mace, held by one of the attendants, the handle being of the same metal, and about an inch and a half in diameter—this he placed on a block of wood.

The anxiety of De Vaux for his master's honour led him to whisper in English—"Beware what you attempt, my liege! Your full strength is not as yet returned—give no triumph to the infidel."

"Peace!" said Richard, standing firm on his ground, and casting a fierce glance around—"thinkest thou that I can fail in *his* presence?"

The glittering broadsword, wielded by both his hands, rose aloft to the King's left shoulder, circled round his



RICHARD AND SALADIN

head, descended with the sway of some terrific engine, and the bar of steel rolled on the ground in two pieces, as a woodsman would sever a sapling with a hedging-bill.

"By the head of the Prophet, a most wonderful blow!" said the Soldan, critically and accurately examining the steel bar which had been cut asunder; and the blade of the sword was so well tempered as to exhibit not the least token of having suffered by the feat it had performed. He then took the King's hand, and looking on the size and muscular strength which it exhibited, laughed as he placed it beside his own, so lank and thin, so inferior in brawn and sinew.

"Ay, look well," said De Vaux, in English, "it will be long ere your long jackanape's fingers do such a feat with your fine gilded reaping-hook there."

"Silence, De Vaux," said Richard; "by Our Lady, he understands or guesses thy meaning—be not so broad, I pray thee."

The Soldan, indeed, presently said—"Something I would fain attempt—though, wherefore should the weak show their inferiority in presence of the strong? Yet each land hath its own exercises, and this may be new to the Melech Ric."—So saying, he took from the floor a cushion of silk and down, and placed it upright on one end.—"Can thy weapon, my brother, sever that cushion?" he said to King Richard.

"No, surely," replied the King; "no sword on earth can cut that which opposes no steady resistance to the blow."

"Mark, then," said Saladin. He unsheathed his scimitar, a curved and narrow blade, which glittered not like the swords of the Franks, but was, on the contrary, of a dull blue colour, marked with ten millions of meandering lines, which showed how anxiously the metal had been welded by the armourer.

Wielding this weapon, apparently so inefficient when compared to that of Richard, the Soldan stood resting his weight upon his left foot, which was slightly advanced; he balanced himself a little as if to steady his aim, then stepping at once forward, drew the scimitar across the cushion, applying the edge so dexterously, and with so little apparent effort, that the cushion seemed rather to fall asunder than to be divided by violence.

"It is a juggler's trick," said De Vaux, darting forward and snatching up the portion of the cushion which had been cut off, as if to assure himself of the reality of the feat.

The Soldan seemed to comprehend him, for he undid the sort of veil which he had hitherto worn, laid it double along the edge of his sabre, extended the weapon edgeways in the air, and drawing it suddenly through the veil, although it hung on the blade entirely loose, severed that also in two parts, which floated to different sides of the tent, equally displaying the extreme temper and sharpness of the weapon, and the exquisite dexterity of him who used it.

"Now, in good faith, my brother," said Richard, "thou art even matchless at the trick of the sword, and right perilous were it to meet thee! Still, however, I put some faith in a downright English blow, and what we cannot do by sleight we eke out by strength. Nevertheless, in truth thou art as expert in inflicting wounds, as my sage Hakim in curing them. I trust I shall see the learned leech—I have much to thank him for, and have brought some small present."

As he spoke, Saladin exchanged his turban for a Tartar cap. He had no sooner done so, than De Vaux opened at once his extended mouth and his large round eyes, and Richard gazed with scarce less astonishment, while the Soldan spoke in a grave and altered voice: "The sick man, sayeth the poet, while he is yet infirm, knoweth the

physician by his step; but when he is recovered, he knoweth not even his face when he looks upon him."

"A miracle!—a miracle!" exclaimed Richard. "That I should lose my learned Hakim, merely by absence of his cap and robe, and that I should find him again in my royal brother Saladin!"

"Such is oft the fashion of the world," answered the Soldan; "the tattered robe makes not always the dervish."

"And it was through thy intercession," said Richard, "that yonder knight of the Leopard was saved from death—and by thy artifice that he revisited my camp in disguise?"

"Even so," replied Saladin; "I was physician enough to know that unless the wounds of his bleeding honour were staunched, the days of his life must be few. His disguise was more easily penetrated than I had expected from the success of my own."

"An accident," said King Richard (probably alluding to the circumstance of his applying his lips to the wound of the supposed Nubian), "let me first know that his skin was artificially discoloured; and that hint once taken, detection became easy, for his form and person are not to be forgotten. I confidently expect that he will do battle on the morrow."

"He is full in preparation and high in hope," said the Soldan. "I have furnished him with weapons and horse, thinking nobly of him from what I have seen under various disguises."

"Knows he now," said Richard, "to whom he lies under obligation?"

"He doth," replied the Saracen—"I was obliged to confess my person when I unfolded my purpose."

"And confessed he aught to you?" said the King of England.

"Nothing explicit," replied the Soldan; "but from much that passed between us, I conceive his love is too highly placed to be happy in its issue."

"And thou knowest that his daring and insolent passion crossed thine own wishes?" said Richard.

"I might guess so much," said Saladin; "but his passion had existed ere my wishes had been formed—and, I must add now is likely to survive them. I cannot, in honour, revenge me for my disappointment on him who had no hand in it. Or, if this high-born dame loved him better than myself, who can say that she did not justice to a knight of her own religion, who is full of nobleness? But with your permission, noble brother, I must take leave of thee for the present, to receive the Duke of Austria and yonder Nazarene knight, much less worthy of hospitality, but who must yet be suitably entreated, not for their sakes, but for mine own honour."

The Saracen Monarch departed from King Richard's tent, and having indicated to him, rather with signs than with speech, where the pavilion of the Queen and her attendants was pitched, he went to receive the Marquis of Montserrat and his attendants, for whom, with less good-will, but with equal splendour, the magnificent Soldan had provided accommodations. The most ample refreshments were spread before the royal and princely guests of Saladin, each in their own separate pavilion.

XXXIII

ON THE EVE OF THE COMBAT

Ere Richard had finished his meal, De Vaux entered.

"The good knight," he said, "who is to do battle to-morrow, requests to know, whether he may not to-night pay duty to his royal godfather?"

"Hast thou seen him, De Vaux?" said the King, smiling; "and did'st thou know an ancient acquaintance?"

"There are so many surprises and changes in this land that my poor brain turns," answered De Vaux. "I scarce knew Sir Kenneth of Scotland, till his good hound, that had been for a short time under my care, came and fawned on me."

"Thou art better skilled in brutes than men, De Vaux," said the King.

"I will not deny," said De Vaux, "I have found them ofttimes the honester animals. Also, your Grace is pleased to term me sometimes a brute myself; besides that, I serve the Lion, whom all men acknowledge the king of brutes."

"By Saint George," said the King, "I have ever said thou hast a sort of wit, De Vaux. But to the present gear—is the good knight well armed and equipped?"

"Fully, my liege, and nobly," answered De Vaux.

"'Tis well," said Richard; "and now for the knight's request. Say to him, Richard will receive him when the discharge of his devoir beside the Diamond of the Desert shall have atoned for his fault beside the Mount of Saint George; and as thou passest through the camp, let the Queen know I will visit her pavilion."

De Vaux departed, and in about an hour afterwards, Richard, wrapping his mantle around him, walked in the direction of the Queen's pavilion. In the interior of the pavilion he found Thomas de Vaux in attendance on the Queen. King Richard spoke for some time secretly and apart with his fair kinswoman.

At length, "Are we still foes, my fair Edith?" he said, in a whisper.

"No, my liege," said Edith, "none can bear enmity against King Richard, when he deigns to show himself, as

he really is, generous and noble, as well as valiant and honourable."

So saying, she extended her hand to him. The King kissed it in token of reconciliation, and then proceeded.

"You think, my sweet cousin, that my anger in this matter was feigned; but you are deceived. The punishment I inflicted upon this knight was just; for he had betrayed—no matter for how tempting a bribe, fair cousin,—the trust committed to him. But I rejoice, perchance as much as you, that to-morrow gives him a chance to win the field, and throw back the stain which for a time clung to him, upon the actual thief and traitor. No!—future times may blame Richard for impetuous folly; but they shall say, that in rendering judgment, he was just when he should, and merciful when he could."

"Laud not thyself, cousin King," said Edith; "they may call thy justice cruelty—thy mercy caprice."

"And do not thou pride thyself," said the King, "as if thy knight, who hath not yet buckled on his armour, were unbelting it in triumph.—Conrade of Montserrat is held a good lance. What if the Scot should lose the day?"

"It is impossible!" said Edith, firmly—"My own eyes saw yonder Conrade tremble and change colour, like a base thief. He is guilty—and the trial by combat is an appeal to the justice of God—I myself, in such a cause, would encounter him without fear."

"By the mass, I think thou would'st," said the King, "and beat him to boot; for there never breathed a truer Plantagenet than thou."

He paused, and added in a very serious tone, —"See that thou continue to remember what is due to thy birth. I will speak plainly, Edith, and as to a friend,—What will this knight be to you, should he come off victor from yonder lists?"

"To *me?*" said Edith, blushing deep with shame and

displeasure,—"What *can* he be to me more than an honoured knight, worthy of such grace as Queen Berengaria might confer on him, had he selected her for his lady, instead of a more unworthy choice ?"

"Yet he hath served and suffered much for you," said the King.

"I have paid his services with honour and applause, and his sufferings with tears," answered Edith. "Had he desired other reward, he would have done wisely to have bestowed his affections within his own degree. Trust me my liege, your poor kinswoman will never wed either infidel or obscure adventurer."

XXXIV

THE COMBAT

It had been agreed, on account of the heat of the climate, that the judicial combat, which was the cause of the present assemblage of various nations at the Diamond of the Desert, should take place at one hour after sunrise. The wide lists, which had been constructed under the inspection of the Knight of the Leopard, enclosed a space of hard sand which was one hundred and twenty yards long by forty in width. They extended in length from north to south, so as to give both parties the equal advantage of the rising sun.

Saladin's royal seat was erected on the western side of the enclosure, just in the centre, where the combatants were expected to meet in mid encounter. Opposed to this was a gallery with closed casements, so contrived, that the ladies, for whose accommodation it was erected, might see the fight without being themselves exposed to view.

At one extremity of the lists were placed the followers of Richard, and opposed to them were those who accompanied the defender, Conrade. Around the throne destined for the Soldan, were ranged his splendid Georgian Guards, and the rest of the enclosure was occupied by Christian and Mahommedan spectators.

The hour at length arrived, the trumpets sounded, the knights rode into the lists armed at all points, and mounted like men who were to do battle for a kingdom's honour. They wore their vizors up, and riding round the lists three times, showed themselves to the spectators.

Both were goodly persons, and both had noble countenances. But there was an air of manly confidence on the brow of the Scot—a radiancy of hope, which amounted even to cheerfulness, while, although pride and effort had recalled much of Conrade's natural courage, there lowered still on his brow a cloud of ominous despondence. Even his steed seemed to tread less lightly and blithely to the trumpet-sound than the noble Arab which was bestrode by Sir Kenneth.

A temporary altar was erected just beneath the gallery occupied by the Queen, and beside it stood the Hermit in the dress of his order, as a Carmelite friar. Other churchmen were also present. To this altar the challenger and defender were successively brought forward, conducted by their respective sponsors. Dismounting before it, each knight avouched the justice of his cause by a solemn oath on the Evangelists, and prayed that his success might be according to the truth or falsehood of what he then swore.

The challenger pronounced his vow with a firm and manly voice, and a bold and cheerful countenance. When the ceremony was finished, the Scottish Knight looked at the gallery, and bent his head to the earth, as if in honour of those invisible beauties which were enclosed within ;

then, loaded with armour as he was, sprung to the saddle without the use of the stirrup, and made his courser carry him in a succession of caracoles to his station at the eastern extremity of the lists.

Conrade also presented himself before the altar with boldness enough ; but his voice, as he took the oath, sounded hollow, as if drowned in his helmet. The lips with which he appealed to Heaven to adjudge victory to the just quarrel, grew white as they uttered the impious mockery. As he turned to remount his horse, the Grand Master approached him closer, as if to rectify something about the sitting of his gorget, and whispered,—" Coward and fool !—recall thy senses, and do me this battle bravely, else, by Heaven, should'st thou escape him, thou escapest not *me !* "

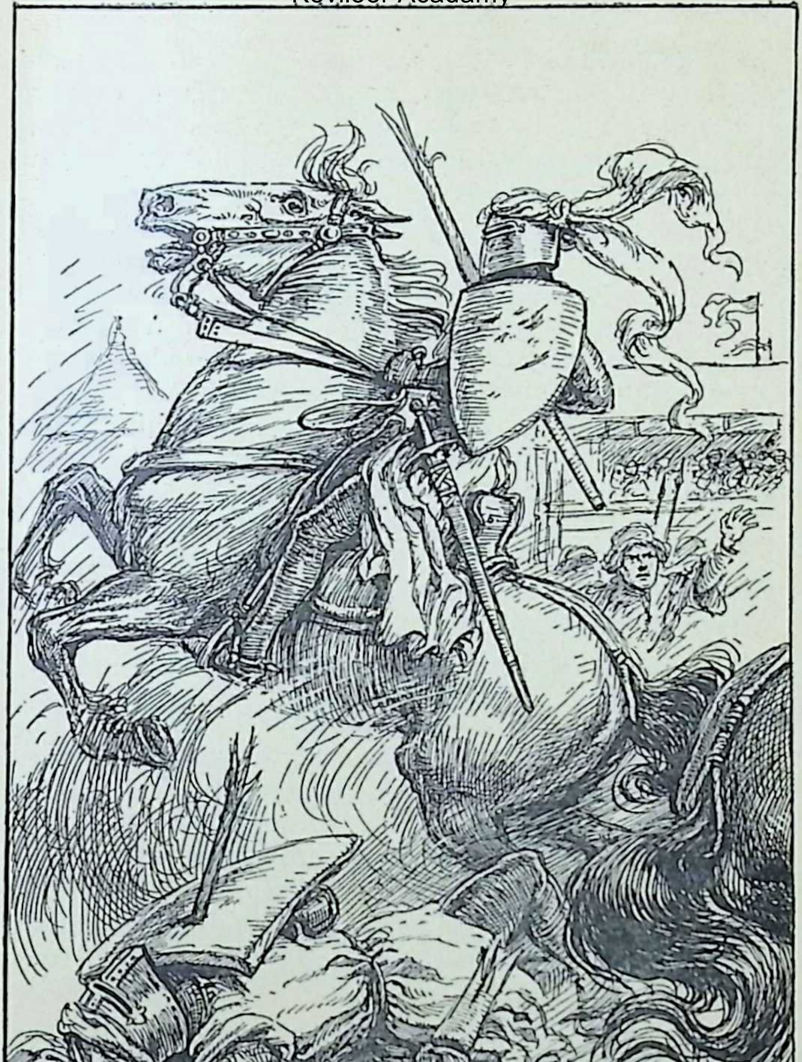
The savage tone in which this was whispered, perhaps completed the confusion of the Marquis's nerves, for he stumbled as he made to horse ; and the accident did not escape those who were on the watch for omens which might predict the fate of the day.

The priests, after a solemn prayer, that God would show the rightful quarrel, departed from the lists.

The trumpets of the challenger then rung a flourish and a herald-at-arms proclaimed at the eastern end of the lists,—

" *Here stands a good knight, Sir Kenneth of Scotland, champion for the royal King Richard of England, who accuseth Conrade, Marquis of Montserrat, of foul treason and dishonour done to the said King.*"

When the words Kenneth of Scotland announced the name and character of the champion, hitherto scarce generally known, a loud and cheerful acclaim burst from the followers of King Richard, and hardly, notwithstanding repeated commands of silence, suffered the reply of the defendant to be heard. He, of course, avowed his innocence, and offered his body for battle.



THE COMBAT

The esquires of the combatants now approached, and delivered to each his shield and lance, assisting to hang the former around his neck, that his two hands might remain free, the one for the management of the bridle, the other to direct the lance.

Each shook his lance aloft, as if to ascertain the weight and toughness of the unwieldy weapon, and then laid it in rest. The sponsors, heralds, and squires, now retired to the barriers, and the combatants sat opposite to each other, face to face, with couched lance and closed vizor, the human form so completely enclosed, that they looked more like statues of molten iron, than beings of flesh and blood.

The silence of suspense was now general—men breathed thicker, and their very souls seemed seated in their eyes, while not a sound was to be heard save the snorting and pawing of the good steeds, who, sensible of what was about to happen, were impatient to dash into career.

They stood thus for perhaps three minutes, when at a signal given by the Soldan, a hundred instruments rent the air with their brazen clamours, and each champion striking his horse with the spurs, and slacking the rein, the horses started into full gallop, and the knights met in mid space with a shock like a thunderbolt.

The victory was not in doubt—no, not one moment.

Conrade, indeed, showed himself a practised warrior; for he struck his antagonist knightly in the midst of his shield, bearing his lance so straight and true, that it shivered into splinters from the steel spear-head up to the very gauntlet.

The horse of Sir Kenneth recoiled two or three yards and fell on his haunches, but the rider easily raised him with hand and rein. But for Conrade there was no recovery.

Sir Kenneth's lance had pierced through the shield, through a plated corslet of Milan steel, through a *secret*, or coat of linked mail, worn beneath the corslet, had

wounded him deep in the bosom, and borne him from his saddle, leaving the truncheon of the lance fixed in his wound.

The sponsors, heralds, and Saladin himself, descended from his throne, crowded round the wounded man ; while Sir Kenneth, who had drawn his sword ere yet he discovered his antagonist was totally helpless, now commanded him to avow his guilt, the helmet was hastily unclosed, and the wounded man, gazing wildly on the skies, replied,—

" What would you more ?—God hath decided justly—I am guilty—but there are worse traitors in the camp than I.—In pity to my soul let me have a confessor ! "

He revived as he uttered these words.

" The talisman—the powerful remedy, royal brother." said King Richard to Saladin.

" The traitor," answered the Soldan, " is more fit to be dragged from the lists to the gallows by the heels, than to profit by its virtues ; and some such fate is in his look," he added, after gazing fixedly upon the wounded man.

" Nevertheless," said Richard, " I pray you do for him what you may, that he may at least have time for confession—Slay not soul and body ! "

" My royal brother's wish shall be obeyed," said Saladin.—" Slaves, bear this wounded man to our tent."

" Do not so," said the Templar, who had hitherto stood gloomily looking on in silence.—" The royal Duke of Austria and myself will not permit this unhappy Christian Prince to be delivered over to the Saracens, that they may try their spells upon him. We are his sponsors, and demand that he be assigned to our care."

" That is, you refuse the certain means offered to recover him ? " said Richard.

" Not so," said the Grand Master, recollecting himself. —" If the Soldan uses lawful medicines, he may attend the patient in my tent."

"Do so, I pray thee, good brother," said Richard to Saladin, "though the permission be ungraciously yielded. —But now to a more glorious work.—Sound trumpets—shout England—in honour of England's champion!"

XXXV

THE CHAMPION! SLAVE OR PRINCE?

DRUM, clarion, trumpet and cymbal, rung forth at once, and the deep and regular shout, which for ages has been the English acclamation, sounded amidst the shrill and irregular yells of the Arabs, like the diapason of the organ amid the howling of a storm. There was silence at length.

"Brave Knight of the Leopard," resumed Cœur de Lion, "thou hast shown that the Ethiopian *may* change his skin, and the leopard his spots, though clerks quote Scripture for the impossibility. Yet I have more to say to you when I have conducted you to the presence of the ladies, the best judges, and best rewarders, of deeds of chivalry."

The Knight of the Leopard bowed assent.

"And thou, princely Saladin, wilt also attend them. I promise thee our Queen will not think herself welcome, if she lacks the opportunity to thank her royal host for her most princely reception."

Saladin bent his head gracefully, but declined the invitation.

"I must attend the wounded man," he said. "The leech leaves not his patient more than the champion the lists. At noon," said the Soldan, as he departed, "I trust ye will accept a collation under the black camel-skin tent of a chief of Curdostan."

The same invitation was circulated among the Christians comprehending all those of sufficient importance to be admitted to sit at a feast made for princes.

"Hark!" said Richard, "the timbrels announce that our Queen and her attendants are leaving their gallery. Come, we will to the pavilion, and lead our conqueror thither in triumph."

Blondel tuned his harp to its boldest measure, to welcome the introduction of the victor into the pavilion of Queen Berengaria. He entered, supported on either side by his sponsors, Richard and Thomas Longsword, and knelt gracefully down before the Queen, though more than half the homage was silently rendered to Edith, who sat on her right hand.

"Unarm him, my mistresses," said the King, whose delight was in the execution of such chivalrous usages—"Let Beauty honour Chivalry! Undo his spurs, Berengaria; Queen though thou be, thou owest him what marks of favour thou canst give.—Unlace his helmet, Edith—by this hand, thou shalt, wert thou the proudest Plantagenet of the line, and he the poorest knight on earth!"

Both ladies obeyed the royal commands,—Edith blushing and growing pale alternately, as slowly and awkwardly she undid, with Longsword's assistance, the fastenings which secured the helmet.

"And what expect you from beneath this iron shell?" said Richard, as the removal of the casque gave to view the noble countenance of Sir Kenneth, his face glowing with recent exertion, and no less so with present emotion. "What think ye of him, gallants and beauties?" said Richard. "Doth he resemble an Ethiopian slave, or doth he present the face of an obscure and nameless adventurer? No, by my good sword!—Here terminate his various disguises. He hath knelt down before you, unknown save by his worth—he arises, equally distinguished by birth

and by fortune. The adventurous knight, Kenneth, arises David, Earl of Huntingdon, Prince Royal of Scotland ! "

There was a general exclamation of surprise, and Edith dropped from her hand the helmet, which she had just received.

" Yes, my masters," said the King, " it is even so. Ye know how Scotland deceived us when she proposed to send this valiant Earl, with a bold company of her best and noblest, to aid our arms in this conquest of Palestine, but failed to comply with her engagements. This noble youth, under whom the Scottish Crusaders were to have been arrayed, thought foul scorn that his arm should be withheld from the holy warfare, and joined us at Sicily with a small train of devoted and faithful attendants, which was augmented by many of his countrymen to whom the rank of their leader was unknown. The confidants of the Royal Prince had all, saving one old follower, fallen by death, when his secret, but too well kept, had nearly occasioned my cutting off, in a Scottish adventurer, one of the noblest hopes of Europe.—Why did you not mention your rank, noble Huntingdon, when endangered by my hasty and passionate sentence ?—Was it that you thought Richard capable of abusing the advantage I possessed over the heir of a King whom I have so often found hostile ? "

" I did you not that injustice, royal Richard," answered the Earl of Huntingdon ; " but my pride brooked not that I should avow myself Prince of Scotland in order to save my life, endangered for default of loyalty. And, moreover, I have made my vow to preserve my rank unknown till the Crusade should be accomplished ; nor did I mention it save under the seal of confession, to yonder reverend hermit."

" It was the knowledge of that secret, then, which made the good man so urgent with me to recall my severe

sentence?" said Richard. "Well did he say, that, had this good knight fallen by my mandate, I should have wished the deed undone though it had cost me a limb—A limb!—I should have wished it undone had it cost me my life—since the world would have said that Richard had abused the condition in which the heir of Scotland had placed himself, by his confidence in his generosity."

"Yet, may we know of your Grace by what strange and happy chance this riddle was at length read?" said the Queen Berengaria.

"Letters were brought to us from England," said the King, "in which we learnt, among other unpleasant news, that the King of Scotland had seized upon three of our nobles, and alleged, as a cause, that his heir was in our camp, and in our power; and, therefore, William proposed to hold these nobles as hostages for his safety. This gave me the first light on the real rank of the Knight of the Leopard, and my suspicions were confirmed by De Vaux, who, on his return from Askalon, brought back with him the Earl of Huntingdon's sole attendant, a thick-skulled slave, who had gone thirty miles to unfold to De Vaux a secret he should have told to me."

"Old Strauchan must be excused," said the Lord of Gilsland. "He knew from experience that my heart is somewhat softer than if I wrote myself Plantagenet."

"Thy heart soft? thou commodity of old iron—and Cumberland flint, that thou art!" exclaimed the King.—"It is we Plantagenets who boast soft and feeling hearts, Edith," turning to his cousin, with an expression which called the blood into her cheek—"Give me thy hand, my fair cousin, and, Prince of Scotland, thine."

It is needless to follow into further particulars the conferences at the royal tent, or to inquire whether David Earl of Huntingdon, was as mute in the presence of Edith Plantagenet, as when he was bound to act under the

character of an obscure and nameless adventurer. It may be well believed that he there expressed, with suitable earnestness, the passion to which he had so often before found it difficult to give words.

XXXVI

ANOTHER TRAITOR'S FATE

THE hour of noon now approached, and Saladin waited to receive the Princes of Christendom in a tent, which but for its large size, differed little from that of the ordinary shelter of the common Curdman or Arab; yet, beneath its ample and sable covering, was prepared a banquet after the most gorgeous fashion of the East, extended upon carpets of the richest stuffs, with cushions laid for the guests.

But we cannot stop to describe the cloth of gold and silver—the superb embroidery in Arabesque—the shawls of Cashmere—and the muslins of India, which were here unfolded in all their splendour; far less to tell the different niceties of Eastern cookery. Lambs roasted whole, and game and poultry, were piled in vessels of gold, and silver, and porcelain, and intermixed with large mazers of sherbet, cooled in snow and ice, from the caverns of Mount Lebanon.

A magnificent pile of cushions at the head of the banquet, seemed prepared for the master of the feast, and such dignitaries as he might call to share that place of distinction, while from the roof of the tent in all quarters, but over this seat of eminence in particular, waved many a banner and pennon, the trophies of battles won, and kingdoms overthrown. But amongst and above them all,

a long lance displayed a shroud, the banner of Death, with this impressive description—"SALADIN, KING OF KINGS, SALADIN, VICTOR OF VICTORS—SALADIN MUST DIE."

Amid these preparations, the slaves who had arranged the refreshments stood with drooped heads and folded arms, mute and motionless.

Expecting the approach of his princely guests, the Soldan, imbued, as most were, with the superstitions of his time, paused over a horoscope and corresponding scroll, which had been sent to him by the Hermit of Engaddi when he departed from the camp.

"Strange and mysterious science," he muttered to himself, "which, pretending to draw the curtain of futurity, misleads those whom it seems to guide, and darkens the scene which it pretends to illuminate! Who would not have said that I was that enemy most dangerous to Richard, whose enmity was to be ended by marriage with his kinswoman? Yet it now appears that a union betwixt this gallant Earl and the lady will bring about friendship betwixt Richard and Scotland, an enemy more dangerous than I, as a wild-cat in a chamber is more to be dreaded than a lion in a distant desert.—But then," he continued to mutter to himself, "the combination intimates, that this husband was to be a Christian.—Christian?" he repeated, after a pause,—"That gave the insane fanatic star-gazer hopes that I may renounce my faith! but me, the faithful follower of our Prophet—me it should have undeceived. Lie there, mysterious scroll," he added, thrusting it under the pile of cushions.—"How now, what means this intrusion?"

He spoke to the dwarf Nectabanus, who rushed into the tent fearfully agitated—his mouth open, his eyes staring, his hands, with their shrivelled and deformed fingers, widely expanded.

"What now," said the Soldan

"*Accipe hoc!*" groaned the dwarf.

"Ha! say'st thou?" answered the Soldan.

"*Accipe hoc!*" replied the panic-struck creature, unconscious, perhaps, that he repeated the same words as before.—"Hear, hear me, great Soldan."

"Nay, if thou hast actual wrong to complain of," said Saladin, "fool or wise, thou art entitled to the ear of a King.—Retire hither with me"; and he led him into the inner tent.

Whatever their conference related to, it was soon broken off by the fanfare of the trumpets, announcing the arrival of the various Christian princes, whom Saladin welcomed to his tent with a royal courtesy well becoming their rank and his own; but chiefly he saluted the young Earl of Huntingdon, and generously congratulated him upon prospects, which seemed to have interfered with and overclouded those which he had himself entertained.

"But think not," said the Soldan, "thou noble youth, that the Prince of Scotland is more welcome to Saladin, than was Kenneth to the solitary Ilderim when they met in the desert, or the distressed Ethiop to the Hakim Adonbec. A brave and generous disposition like thine hath a value independent of condition and birth, as the cool draught, which I here proffer thee, is as delicious from an earthen vessel as from a goblet of gold."

The Earl of Huntingdon made a suitable reply, gratefully acknowledging the various important services he had received from the generous Soldan; but when he had pledged Saladin in the bowl of sherbet, which the Soldan had proffered to him, the Archduke of Austria, who stood a little apart, took with pleasure and some bluntness the deep goblet, as the Earl of Huntingdon was about to replace it.

"Most delicious," he exclaimed, after a deep draught, which the heat of the weather had rendered acceptable.

He sighed as he handed the cup to the Grand Master of the Templars.

Saladin made a sign to the dwarf, who advanced and pronounced, with a harsh voice, the words, *Accipe hoc!*

The Templar started, like a steed who sees a lion under a bush, beside the pathway; yet instantly recovered, and to hide, perhaps his confusion, raised the goblet to his lips—but those lips never touched that goblet's rim. The sabre of Saladin left its sheath as lightning leaves the cloud. It was waved in the air,—and the head of the Grand Master rolled to the extremity of the tent, while the trunk remained for a second standing, with the goblet still clenched in its grasp, then fell, the liquid mingling with the blood that spurted from its veins.

There was a general exclamation of treason, and Austria nearest to whom Saladin stood with the bloody sabre in his hand, started back as if apprehensive that his turn was to come next. Richard and others laid hand on their swords.

"Fear nothing, noble Austria," said Saladin, as composedly as if nothing had happened, "nor you, royal England, be wroth at what you have seen. Not for his manifold treasons;—not for the attempt which, as may be vouched by his own squire, he instigated against King Richard's life;—not that he pursued the Prince of Scotland and myself in the desert, reducing us to save our lives by the speed of our horses;—not for any or all of these crimes does he now lie there, although each were deserving such a doom;—but, because, scarce half an hour ere he polluted our presence, he poniarded his comrade and accomplice, Conrade of Montserrat lest he should confess the infamous plots in which they had both been engaged."

"How? Conrade murdered?—And by the Grand Master, his sponsor and most intimate friend?" exclaimed

Richard. "Noble Soldan, I would not doubt thee—yet this must be proved—otherwise——"

"There stands the evidence," said Saladin, pointing to the terrified dwarf. "Allah, who sends the fire-fly to illuminate the night season, can discover secret crimes by the most contemptible means."

The Soldan proceeded to tell the dwarf's story, which amounted to this.—In his foolish curiosity, or, as he partly confessed, with some thoughts of pilfering, Nectabanus had strayed into the tent of Conrade, which had been deserted by his attendants. The wounded man slept under the influence of the Soldan's wonderful talisman, so that the dwarf had opportunity to pry about at pleasure, until he was frightened into concealment by the sound of a heavy step. He skulked behind a curtain, yet could see the motions, and hear the words of the Grand Master, who entered, and carefully secured the covering of the pavilion behind him. His victim started from sleep, and it would appear that he instantly suspected the purpose of his old associate, for it was in a tone of alarm that he demanded wherefore he disturbed him?

"I come to confess and absolve thee," answered the Grand Master.

Of their further speech the terrified dwarf remembered little, save that Conrade implored the Grand Master not to break a wounded reed, and that the Templar struck him to the heart with a Turkish dagger, with the words *Accipe hoc*—words which long afterwards haunted the terrified imagination of the concealed witness.

"I verified the tale," said Saladin, "by causing the body to be examined; and I made this unhappy being, whom Allah hath made the discoverer of the crime, repeat in your own presence words which the murderer spoke; and you yourselves saw the effect which they produced upon his conscience!"

The Soldan paused, and the King of England broke silence :—

" If this be true, as I doubt not, we have witnessed a great act of justice, though it bore a different aspect. But wherefore in this presence? wherefore with thine own hand ? "

" I had designed otherwise," said Saladin ; " but had I not hastened his doom, it had been altogether averted, since, if I had permitted him to taste of my cup, as he was about to do, how could I, without incurring the brand of inhospitality, have done him to death as he deserved ? Had he murdered my father, and afterwards partaken of my food and my bowl, not a hair of his head could have been injured by me. But enough of him—let his carcase and his memory be removed from amongst us."

The body was carried away, and the marks of the slaughter obliterated or concealed with such ready dexterity, as showed that the case was not altogether so uncommon as to paralyse the assistants and officers of Saladin's household.

XXXVII

THE END

The Christian Princes felt that the scene which they had beheld weighed heavily on their spirits, and, although at the courteous invitation of the Soldan, they assumed their seats at the banquet, yet it was with the silence of doubt and amazement. Richard seemed to ruminate on some proposition, as if he were desirous of making it in the most insinuating and acceptable manner which was possible.

At length he desired to know whether it was not true that the Soldan had honoured the Earl of Huntingdon with a personal encounter.

Saladin answered with a smile, that he had proved his horse and his weapons with the heir of Scotland, as cavaliers are wont to do with each other when they meet in the desert—and modestly added, that he had not much reason to pride himself in the event.

The Scot, on the other hand, disclaimed the attributed superiority, and wished to assign it to the Soldan.

" Enough of honour thou hast had in the encounter," said Richard, " and I envy thee more for that, than for the smiles of Edith Plantagenet. But what say you, noble princes ; is it fitting that such a royal ring of chivalry should break up without something being done for future times to speak of ? What is the overthrow and death of a traitor to such a fair garland of honour as is here assembled, and which ought not to part without witnessing something more worthy of their regard ? How say you, princely Soldan—What if we two should now and before this fair company, decide the long-contended question for this land of Palestine, and end at once these tedious wars ? Yonder are the lists ready. I, unless worthier offers, will lay down my gauntlet on behalf of Christendom, and, in all love and honour, we will do mortal battle for the possession of Jerusalem."

There was a deep pause for the Soldan's answer. His cheek and brow coloured highly, and it was the opinion of many present that he hesitated whether he should accept the challenge. At length he said,—

" Fighting for the Holy City against those whom we regard as idolaters, and worshippers of stocks and stones, and graven images. I might confide that Allah would strengthen my arm, or if I fell beneath the sword of the Melech Ric, I could not pass to Paradise by a more

glorious death. But Allah has already given Jerusalem to the true believers, and it were a tempting the God of the Prophet to peril, upon my own personal strength and skill, that which I hold securely by the superiority of my forces."

"If not for Jerusalem, then," said Richard, in the tone of one who would entreat a favour of an intimate friend, "yet, for the love of honour, let us run at least three courses with grinded lances."

"Even this," said Saladin, half smiling at Cœur de Lion's affectionate earnestness for the combat, "even this may I not lawfully do. The master places the shepherd over the flock, not for the shepherd's own sake, but for the sake of the sheep. Had I a son to hold the sceptre when I fell, I might have had the liberty, as I have the will, to brave this bold encounter; but your own Scripture sayeth that when the herdsman is smitten, the sheep are scattered."

"Thou hast all the fortune," said Richard, turning to the Earl of Huntingdon with a sigh. "I would have given the best year of my life for that one half hour beside the Diamond of the Desert!"

The chivalrous extravagance of Richard awakened the spirits of the assembly, and when at length they arose to depart, Saladin advanced, and took Cœur de Lion by the hand.

"Noble King of England," he said, "we now part, never to meet again. That your league is dissolved, no more to be reunited, and that your native forces are too few to enable you to persecute your enterprise, is as well known to me as to yourself. I may not yield you up that Jerusalem which you so much desire to hold. It is to us, as to you, a Holy City. But whatever other terms Richard demands of Saladin, shall be as willingly yielded as yonder fountain yields its waters. Ay, and the same should be

as frankly afforded by Saladin, if Richard stood in the desert with but two archers in his train!"

[The next day saw Richard return to his own camp, and in a short space afterwards the young Earl of Huntingdon was espoused by Edith Plantagenet.

The Soldan sent as a nuptial present on this occasion, the celebrated TALISMAN; but though many cures were wrought by means of it in Europe, none equalled in success and celebrity those which the Soldan achieved. It is still in existence, having been bequeathed by the Earl of Huntingdon to a brave knight of Scotland, Sir Simon of the Lee, in whose ancient and highly honoured family it is still preserved.

Our story closes here, as the terms on which Richard relinquished his conquests are to be found in every history of the period.]

NOTES

p. 16 : Curtal axe. A battle-axe, with a short handle and long blade as shown in the Bayeux Tapestry.

p. 16 : Three lions passant. A term in heraldry meaning lions shown with heads looking towards the spectators and the right forepaw raised, as in the Royal Arms of England.

p. 19 : Templars. A religious order of soldier-knights which was founded about 1118 with the object of protecting pilgrims to the Holy Land.
The order afterwards became wealthy and politically powerful, and was suppressed in 1312. The original buildings and Church in the Temple, London, belonged to these knights.

p. 22 : Shalm. A musical wind instrument, with a reed mouthpiece, like the modern oboe.

p. 48 : Byzant (or bezant). A gold coin issued by the Emperor of the West (Byzantium) at Constantinople, and current in Europe from the sixth to the fifteenth century. It varied in weight in England between a sovereign and half-a-sovereign.

p. 50 : Bills and bows. Archers, and soldiers armed with bills, which were weapons with a staff about four feet long, ending in a long knife shaped blade which sometimes had projections on either side and a curved beak at the top.

p. 65 : Wight. An old Saxon word meaning counsellor.

p. 67 : Minion. From the French *mignon*, here used as meaning inferior.

p. 121 : Falchion. A sword with a slightly curved blade which widened towards the point.

p. 137 : Phalanx. A Greek word meaning a body of foot soldiers who are drawn up in close and deep formation.

p. 149 : Vizor. The front-piece of a helmet which was arranged to lift or open and show the face.

p. 150 : Caracoles. From the French, meaning capering about.

p. 150 : Gorget. A piece of armour defending the throat.

p. 158 : Mazer. A large drinking bowl.

p. 160 : *Accipe hoc.* Latin—receive this !